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**The Gothic Threshold of
Sabine Baring-Gould: A Study of the
Gothic Fiction of a Victorian Squarson**

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Gothic fiction of Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), with particular attention given to Baring-Gould's roles as squire and parson. I have chosen to analyze two of Baring-Gould's Gothic works, the novel *Mehalah* (1880) and the novella *Margery of Quether* (1884), both which allow a particularly profitable examination of the influence of Baring-Gould's roles on his fiction.

In studying these texts I apply my theory of Gothic fiction as a particularly modern genre built upon a "Gothic threshold," a meeting point of extreme opposites which ambivalently contrasts and merges the categories of the modern and the medieval.

In the first chapter I describe how Baring-Gould's unique Hegelian-influenced Tractarian philosophy influenced his creation of the dialectical setting of *Mehalah*. I argue that because of this influence *Mehalah* should be recognized as a significant contribution to the literature of the Oxford Movement.

In the second chapter I argue that *Mehalah*'s historical setting in the time of the French Revolution and the influence of *Wuthering Heights* reinforce *Mehalah*'s use of the "Gothic threshold" structure and contribute to its theme of ambivalent progress.

In the third chapter I discuss the influence of Baring-Gould's sermon-writing on *Mehalah* and consider connections between Baring-Gould's role as parson and the novel's botched marriage theme.

In the final chapter I discuss *Margery of Quether* as an innovation in the Gothic and vampire tradition as perhaps the only Gothic work that directly dramatizes the Land Law debate and presents that debate as a "Gothic" contest. I argue that *Margery* channels Baring-Gould's tensions as a landowner.

In the conclusion I argue that *Mehalah* and *Margery* display Baring-Gould's technique of constructing miniature Gothic battles that relate to larger confrontations, and that the ultimate terror presented in these works is the conclusion of the battle between ancient and modern forces.

Introduction

Part I: The Gothic Threshold

This work is a study of the Victorian Sabine Baring-Gould's novel *Mehalah* (1880) and his novella *Margery of Quether* (1884), both Gothic texts, and both constructed upon what I will describe as a "Gothic threshold." In this first part of the introduction I will explain my understanding of the "Gothic threshold" as the seminal concept of the Gothic fiction tradition. In the second I will introduce Baring-Gould. Then I will proceed to a discussion of these two works in the succeeding chapters of my thesis.

I developed my Gothic threshold theory from my study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's highly deliberate use of the Gothic tradition in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). While analyzing the novel, I decided to focus my thoughts on its opening action, in which a character crosses a threshold space from a dark, ancient world into a modern world of light. Hawthorne gives such strangely lingering attention to this action, and gives his character such hesitation in performing it, that I was compelled to consider at length what was being accomplished in this act of crossing the threshold.

I concluded that the writing of an overtly Gothic novel for the characteristically ponderous Hawthorne was concurrently an *analysis* of the Gothic novel, and that he consciously or unconsciously perceived Gothic fiction as having a threshold form. Thus his novel's setting was constructed as a playfully literal

threshold between a dark haunted house and the bright street of the modern world that had incongruously encroached up to that house's very doorstep.

Hawthorne reworked the Gothic castle—and particularly the castle of the Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)¹—into an American equivalent of a fairly old, “haunted” house, the House of the Seven Gables. Hawthorne's textual source is appropriate since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* has been commonly considered the first Gothic novel. It certainly was a popular and influential book—the progenitor of the Gothic tradition, and concurrently of the Gothic threshold concept which, as I will now describe, issued forth as the generic form of that tradition.

In the first preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole enacts a literary hoax, saying that he did not write, but merely translated the tale that follows. The text, he claims, is medieval in origin, written by a Roman Catholic priest, and discovered by Walpole in the library of an ancient Roman Catholic family in the north of England. This hoax allows Walpole to maintain a certain amount of distance from his text: he did not *write* such a strange tale; he is simply *presenting* it, as a modern archeologist might present some odd relic of ancient times.

Once the novel—or “ancient” tale—met with approval, Walpole confessed in a second preface, placed incongruously after the first (which was, after all, a significant part of the *Otranto* text), that he *had* in fact written the story. In this second preface he discusses in detail his purpose in writing such a strange tale.

[The Castle of Otranto] was an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is

¹ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, ed. W.S. Lewis, London: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1764].

always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting, but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old Romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion. (7)

Walpole here is contrasting as opposites the old medieval Romance of knights, magic, and adventure and the modern Romance—that is, the modern novel of more commonplace situations that rose to prominence in the late-seventeenth century and satisfied a taste for realistic characters and realistic situations. We might infer that Walpole hid his authorship of *Otranto* because his story seemed drawn from the past and thus was ill-suited for a modern audience to read—or a modern writer to write. Or perhaps he was ironically performing the role of the modern antiquarian (I will discuss his various “performances” shortly). Nonetheless, he asserts that each style has its strengths and weaknesses. A lack in realism had been overcompensated for in modern times, he says, causing a suffocating restriction of invention. Imbalance had been replaced by imbalance, and Walpole desired to find a middle way by “blending” the two:

The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. (7-8)

Walpole’s literary creation *The Castle of Otranto* was an attempt to bridge the old and new styles of fiction by populating a fantastic tale, as in the medieval Romance, with “real” people, as in the modern novel. Part of Walpole’s “hoax” in the original preface was that his “found” tale was not actually stylistically medieval, but rather medieval merged with modern; concerning the “discovered” tale he writes:

Even as such [a matter of entertainment], some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the manners of the times, who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them. [...] If this *air* of the *miraculous* is excused, the reader will find nothing else unworthy of his perusal. Allow the possibility of the facts, and all the actors comport themselves as persons would do in their situation. (4)

Note that Walpole, even at this point, when he is presenting *Otranto* as a legitimate medieval text, is suggesting his merger by calling attention to the “realism” of his characters amidst the miraculous situations. This merger of modern and medieval is described as opening a space for the ancient “boundless realms of invention” while ensuring that the story remains palatable to the modern reader (one purpose of the first “translator’s” preface is to make the story palatable by enfolding it in a modern framing as art found and analyzed).

Walpole’s deceptively simple concept of the merger of the ancient and modern is what I call the “Gothic threshold.” This threshold idea, elaborated throughout the *Otranto* text, is a complex dynamic which was taken up by the writers in the varied Gothic tradition which followed. This tradition includes the first Gothic novels published in the popular first “wave” that began with *Otranto* in 1764 and died down in the 1820s; it also includes those Victorians and later writers (and filmmakers) who drew on this core tradition and developed it. Engagement with the Gothic threshold, I will argue, is what categorizes these often diverse and even combative works as “Gothic.”

First I will examine the components of this threshold in some initial statements which I will develop throughout this section. Walpole speaks of the merger of opposite ancient and modern *styles* into a new style, and such a merger

would necessarily draw in dichotomies related to the opposed styles. This merger would in fact entail the meeting of two whole opposed “worlds”—that is, the grand contrasting generality of cultures, attitudes, and the rest associated with the ancient world and the modern world. As Walpole states, the modern novel was shaped by an inclination towards rationality and taste for realism, while the Romance was shaped by a world more accepting of the fantastic and the extraordinary. These styles were integrally interwoven with the cultures that produced them.

In *Otranto*, the term “ancient” corresponds with the terms “medieval” and “Gothic” as the time in Europe from the fall of “civilized” Rome until the rise of rational, individualistic, “modern” movements revolting against political, religious, and other authorities; the “modern” was Walpole’s own time, the time of the prevalence of these usurping forces.

The adjective “Gothic” originally applied to the Germanic tribe of the Goths who spread across Europe via the Baltic shores between the third and fifth centuries. The Goths were one of the “barbaric” tribes who gained power after the fall of Rome. As Chris Baldick explains, the term “Gothic” was incorporated into a widely held dichotomy related to progress:

Long after [the Goths] disappeared into the ethnic melting-pots of the northern Mediterranean, their fearful name was taken and used to prop up one side of that set of cultural oppositions by which the Renaissance and its heirs defined and claimed possession of European civilization: Northern versus Southern, Gothic versus Graeco-Roman, Dark Ages versus the Age of Enlightenment, medieval versus modern, barbarity versus civility, superstition versus Reason. (xii)²

This is the dichotomy referred to in the second *Otranto* preface along which Walpole constructed his Gothic threshold. The modern world was generally depicted as a

² Chris Baldick, Introduction, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

world of light, and the medieval world as dark. The term “Dark Age” was first used by Petrarch to describe the post-Roman world, and later applied to all of the medieval age, as a relatively frightening and difficult time of ignorance, superstition, and docile submission by the masses to authority. The more “enlightened” modern movements supposedly freed people from institutional restriction; they were now self-determining, free to use personal rationality to understand rather than merely to obey.

Walpole changed *Otranto*’s subtitle from “A Story” to “A Gothic Story” in the second edition, but it was not until later that researchers applied the term “Gothic fiction” to the works which followed his invented style of mergers. Reviewers of the late eighteenth century began to label the style “Gothic,” and the label stuck. It was a derisive term, suggesting that the works of this literary family, in rejecting orderly classical ideals and realism, belonged to the *Gothic* culture, the barbarous, unrefined culture of the medieval age.

Having briefly discussed the opposition used in the Gothic threshold, I should also explain why Walpole’s proposed merger should be particularly considered a *threshold*. The “old” text of *Otranto* was actually produced by a modern writer in response to modern problems. Walpole’s Gothic style is a modern genre, responding to a modern situation by turning to the past in fiction. The style as described and developed in *Otranto* is not focused wholly on the modern or the ancient, but rather on a threshold space between the two worlds. The label “Gothic fiction” then is somewhat misleading, since the genre is not primarily about the old “Gothic,” but rather about the interaction of the modern and medieval categories.

The Gothic threshold, centered in the merger of fictional styles, immediately expanded into the breadth of the meeting point of dark and light worlds, the medieval and the modern. The Gothic threshold as the point of interaction between modern and ancient was quite a complex and fertile dynamic for the later Gothic tradition, and much of the potential of this dynamic was suggested both directly and indirectly in Walpole's prefaces and story.

In accordance with Walpole's threshold idea, the setting of *Otranto* is medieval, the events are fantastic, and yet the characters can be recognized as fairly realistic and "modern." The plot is also designed according to the threshold idea, centered as it is on a supernatural return of the "past" in retaliation for an old crime of usurpation committed by the grandfather of the present lord of the Castle of Otranto, Manfred. Manfred attempts to fight this judgmental supernatural return but in the end he is defeated and the true lord of Otranto takes the throne.

The *Otranto* tale was certainly influential, yet the *Otranto* prefaces are perhaps even more effective than the main body of the text in expressing and developing the idea of the Gothic threshold.

Walpole's first preface to *Otranto*, in which he claims that the tale is medieval, contains much ironic mockery of modern taste. As I mentioned earlier, Walpole hints at his blending of the modern and the medieval in his first preface which he then further develops in the second. In the first preface Walpole positions himself on the side of the modern set against the inclinations of the past which he himself took up in the writing of *Otranto*. The ambivalence involved in this

straddling of the Gothic threshold is developed throughout the prefaces, as I will now discuss.

Standing on the Threshold

In the “translator’s” preface, Walpole “performs” as both a modern antiquarian and a Roman Catholic priest who he hypothesizes may have written the tale. Walpole actually was a modern antiquarian; he nonetheless “performed” this role theatrically in his writing. Walpole’s antiquarian passion was part of a growing eighteenth-century interest in ancient British cultures which appropriately developed alongside an increasing consideration of the distinction of modern times from the medieval. In *Otranto*, he performs as representatives from contrasting worlds, splitting himself into a threshold self partaking of both the medieval and the modern.

Walpole states that the *Otranto* tale was originally published in Italy in 1529, during the evidently transitional threshold-time of the Protestant Reformation. Though he acknowledges that the tale could have been written earlier, he speculates that it was written in response to this time of transition by a priest firmly associated with the ancient medieval religious culture under attack. Thus the priest employed his tale, which was set in an earlier medieval time between 1095 and 1243, to bring about a return to that past.

Letters were then in their most flourishing state in Italy, and contributed to dispel the empire of superstition, at that time so forcibly attacked by the reformers. It is not unlikely, that an artful priest might endeavor to turn their own arms on the innovators; and might avail himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions. If this was his view, he has certainly acted with signal address. Such a work as the following would enslave a hundred vulgar minds, beyond half the books of controversy that have been written from the days of Luther to the present hour. (Walpole 3-4)

Walpole is the “priest” who is performing this act of regression, likewise providing a counter to modernity through “modern” means, using “his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions”—or at least to allow the imaginative possibilities found in these “errors and superstitions.” In a letter to Madame du Deffand on the subject of *Otranto*, Walpole writes:

Let the critics have their say: I shall not be vexed: it was not written for this age, which wants nothing but cold reason. I own to you, and you will think me madder than ever, that of all my works it is the only one in which I pleased myself: I let my imagination run: my visions and my passions kindled me. I wrote it in defiance of rules, critics, and philosophies: and it seems to me all the better for that.³

Though for different reasons, both Walpole and his made-up priest were vexed at the advance of modernity and wrote with the opposition of the past and present in mind. The priest is positioned as a threshold being because he lived on the crest of modernity while attempting to preserve the past, echoing Walpole’s positioning on a threshold as a modern man infatuated with the pleasures offered by the study and inspiration of the past. Walpole’s desire to create a balanced style of Romance emerges from dissatisfaction with the modern, as if the “realistic” world is a “cramped” environment which does not sound the full range of the individual (Walpole 9).

James Watt argues that, “especially in the decades after the Glorious Revolution of 1688,” the term “Gothic” was

a contested category within debates about the nature of economic, political, and social change: the Gothic was constructed both as a distant, non-specific, period of ignorance and superstition from which an increasingly civilized nation had triumphantly emerged, and as a (similarly distant) fount of constitutional purity and political virtue from which the nation had become dangerously alienated. (14)⁴

³ A letter of 13, March 1767. Recorded in Stephen Gwynn’s *The Life of Horace Walpole* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932) 191.

⁴ *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

John Fletcher explains that even as “Gothic” remained a derisory term, it also became “a lost object of nostalgia and admiration,” and “the repository of whatever is felt to have been lost in the advance of civilisation and Enlightenment” (115).⁵ The derisive attitude towards the “Gothic” is clearly present in Walpole’s prefaces, but the priest also represents Walpole as the defender of Gothic as a “lost object” and “repository” of what modernity had misplaced. The ambivalent perception of the Gothic world as presented by Walpole’s dual performance is part of why I disagree with Baldick’s statement that Gothic fiction is actually “anti-Gothic,” displaying an “ingrained distrust of medieval civilization and its representation of the past primarily in terms of tyranny and superstition (xviii). While I agree that Gothic fiction is anti-Gothic, and does display this distrust, it is also ambivalently anti-modern, and pro-modern and pro-Gothic. The “tyranny and superstition” of the medieval is presented negatively as oppressive and suffocating, but it can also paradoxically be presented as exciting and freeing from the strictures of rational modernity, as Walpole suggests when describing his merger. The fear of the medieval in Gothic fiction also contains desire. From the centered threshold perspective each world is alternately denigrated and appreciated in contrast, as in their opposition each is seen to contain what the other lacks.

The Gothic threshold of *Otranto* was a response to the ambivalent and conflicting cultural tension over modernity and the medieval in Walpole’s day.

⁵ “The Sins of the Fathers: the Persistence of Gothic,” *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, Edward Larrissy, ed, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

The medieval becomes a “space” to step partially outside of the modern, and from the intermediate threshold perspective to consider the ongoing transition towards modernity from an appropriately transitional location.

The tensions addressed by the paradoxical Gothic threshold are evident in *Otranto*’s plot, the prototypical Gothic story of a young woman fleeing from a feudal lord in his feudal castle. The castle’s lord Manfred is “modern” in the sense that his reign is threatened by a frightful, supernatural return of a past dynasty even more “medieval” than he is, while the heroine Isabella—“modern” as the subjective self through whom the modern audience relates to the events of the story—is also “modern” in relation to her oppressor, the relatively “feudal” Manfred. The shifts of Manfred’s role indicate that the central tension of the plot exists not simply between different characters, but as interactions on the Gothic threshold. The story takes place, like *Otranto*’s Reformation-era priest and Walpole in his performances, on that threshold point.

As a concluding ambivalence of *Otranto*, the forces of the past triumph over the alternately “modern” and “feudal” tyrant in the form of the true heir, the “peasant” lad Theodore whose family is revealed to have been usurped. Theodore’s restoration could be seen as an affirmation of the feudal aristocratic hierarchy, but it could also easily represent the reinstatement of the “true heir” of the free and empowered “peasant” as suggested by modern democratic philosophies. Does *Otranto*’s conclusion contain the triumph of the democratic or the feudal ideal? Is it a triumph of the “foreign” Gothic or the “familiar” Gothic, since the “invader” of the castle is revealed to be the “owner”? In *Otranto*’s preface and story we can see that

alongside the distinct opposition of categories exists their simultaneous ambivalent and confusing merger.

The Gothic Religion

One can see in the priest “character” of the first preface of *Otranto* that the Gothic threshold idea has had an essential association with religious ideas from the beginning. Walpole discusses in his first preface the idea presented in his story of the past aggressively and frighteningly encroaching on the relatively “modern”:

More impartial readers may not be so much struck with the beauties of this piece as I was. Yet I am not blind to my author’s defects. I could wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this: that *the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and forth [sic] generation*. I doubt whether, in his time, any more than at present, ambition curbed its appetite of dominion from the dread of so remote a punishment. And yet this moral is weakened by that less direct insinuation, that even such anathema may be diverted, by devotion to St. Nicholas. Here, the interest of the Monk plainly gets the better of the judgement of the Author. (5)

Walpole in ironic “modern” analysis dismisses the “author’s” biblical moral⁶ as ineffective, but the moral nonetheless corresponds with the threshold idea of drawing together the distant and distinct categories of past and present into what in the moral is described as a vindictive and threatening immediacy. Such immediacy is frightening for the modern reader, and yet strangely captivating as well.

Walpole’s ironic commentary continues as he brings his first preface to a conclusion. He says of the “priest’s” tale:

⁶ Taken from Exodus 20:4-6 (KJV):

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Though the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe, that the ground-work of the story is founded on truth. The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle. [...] If a catastrophe, at all resembling that which he describes, is believed to have given rise to this work, it will contribute to interest the reader, and will make the "Castle of Otranto" a still more moving story. (5)

The "modern" Walpole, with his modern analytical attitude, allows the possibility that some parts of this fantastic tale might be true. Any such belief, we are told, will enhance the story. The full frightening impact of a scary story is, after all, dependent on a suspension of disbelief. We learn from the second preface that the story *is* pure imagination, yet this knowledge does not nullify the possibility of *some such* fantastic event occurring. This potential truth of the Gothic tale causes the story to expand beyond its textual parameters, threatening all the world with the possibility of a frightening supernatural event.

The predominant attitude in Protestant England, historically highlighted by the Protestant triumph in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, was to associate Roman Catholicism with the darkly ancient world of Gothic buildings and ruins, while conversely associating Protestantism with the progress of the modern world. With its superstition and "shadowy," foreign authority, Roman Catholicism was a source of fear and distrust for many British Protestants.

This understanding of Catholicism helped to shape the Gothic novel as it shaped the understanding of what was "Gothic" and what was "modern." (American novelists such as Hawthorne would at times associate Catholicism *and* general British culture with the darkly ancient in contrast with their bright "New World," using the American Revolution as threshold point.)

As Victor Sage argues in his *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (1988),⁷ Gothic fiction was strongly influenced by tensions caused by the shifts and adjustments of Protestant Christianity in the transition to modernity. One indication of the significance of religion in the Gothic origin is that Walpole, living in a predominately Protestant culture, claimed that his story—the first Gothic novel—was written by a Roman Catholic priest. Baldick states that Gothic fiction holds a foundation fear of “being dragged back to the persecutions of the Counter-Reformation...” (xiv).

The opposed “worlds” of the Gothic threshold are partly derived from what I term a “cosmic threshold,” that common bifurcated conception found in spirituality and religion of reality as split between the physical and the spiritual. Thresholds have long been invested with meaning related to this cosmic threshold idea. Religious rites and sacred places have involved borders to cross and not to cross. Folklore is filled with significant crossings into spiritual worlds. Both often distinguish between “this” world and an “Otherworld,” the realm of the spiritual and the fantastic.

The ancient Celtic festival *Samhain* (pronounced “SAH-win”), which influenced later Halloween traditions, is associated strongly with the cosmic threshold idea. Samhain means “summer’s end” and it demarcated the transition from the lighter half of the year to the darker half. (*Beltane* was the festival’s counterpart, commemorating the transition from dark to light.) A common belief attached to the festival was that the border between “this” world and the spiritual “Otherworld” at Samhain became thin, allowing spirits to pass through more easily. This “Otherworld” was at times depicted as underground or somehow invisibly concurrent

⁷ Victor Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*., London: Macmillan, 1988.

with the normal world. Eerie “threshold” locations which already possessed a thin border between worlds became especially permeable during Samhain.

Some Celts would dress as evil spirits on Samhain to protect themselves from this increased spiritual traffic, and this tradition, modified yet retained in medieval Christianity, contributed to the development of Halloween. Generally speaking, the dominant medieval Christian cosmos was compatible with cosmos of Celtic folklore, being also divided between the visible world and the world of spirits, demons, and God. One was the visible world, the understood, and knowable; the other was hidden in darkness, invisible and unknowable. Man became traditionally understood as “amphibious,” existing between these worlds, and connected to each.

This cosmic threshold idea remained as a strong cultural concept in Walpole’s day. As modern rational philosophies developed, the rationally “visible” and “knowable” side of this cosmic threshold began to grow in prominence. What Walpole calls the “empire of superstition” was pressed upon, invaded, and at times marginalized by the Protestant Reformers and other modern movements. Gothic fiction was a response to this agitating shift in the cosmic threshold. The cosmic threshold framework was usable in the conceptualization of the modern in opposition to the past. Walpole’s Gothic threshold incorporated the cosmic threshold of the “luminous” physical and the “dark” spiritual along with its incorporation of the modern/medieval opposition. As with Samhain, the Gothic threshold involves a “thinning” between the dark world of the ancient and the modern world, bringing them more into direction connection.

Gothic fiction can be seen as related to religion and “religious” folklore because its setting is a bifurcated world as in the cosmic threshold schema. Thus Gothic fiction has a “religious” function in that it is a consideration of these two worlds and particularly their interaction. I use the term “religious” not in the sense that the system assumes the existence of supernatural events, but that it contends with the religious threshold concept and the supernatural, even if it ultimately provides non-supernatural explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences. The dark side of the threshold can be seen as spiritual, but it can also be discovered as material and psychological—and often in Gothic fiction psychological and spiritual explanations are ambivalently overlapped.

Gothic fiction is involved both in the rationally material explanations of this religious scenario and the resistance to this process—functioning within the tensions of this argument. Gothic fiction incorporates not only the traditional religious mapping of the cosmos, but the residual transitioning-into-modernity contest over the rational and the spiritual explanations contending with this mapping. The Gothic threshold is in part a dramatization of this tense contest; a protagonist and reader, for instance, might be led to question whether a seemingly supernatural occurrence has a material or spiritual source—simultaneously questioning modern and ancient assumptions from a threshold position between the two.

Both a more “spiritualist” Gothic writer and a more “materialist” one are compelled to reestablish the balanced threshold in order to engage with the “dark” side of the past. It is in this way that Gothic fiction re-imagines the cosmic “map,” connecting the modern and the medieval in an unsettled relationship in order to make

a new whole, either by championing the return of the past, confirming the triumph of modernity, or maintaining the uneasy merger of the Gothic threshold.

Baldick writes that Gothic addresses “existential fears” concerning “our inability to escape our decaying bodies,” and “historical fears” concerning a return of the “tyrannies of the past” (xxii); joined with these is a fear of a return of a frightening and dangerous “Otherworld” of the cosmic threshold which carries on into the supposedly rational modern day.

The Janus Face

The setting in Gothic literature has a disturbing effect on the “modern” individual (character and reader) placed in it. Like Walpole and his imaginary priest on the threshold, the modern person becomes detached from a secure position in modernity; he must confront the returning past which is drawn frighteningly alongside the modern as a re-empowered and substantial alternative (the goal of Walpole’s priest-author). Gothic fiction threatens to topple that arrangement in which the modern stands in superiority over the Gothic world, configuring the worlds instead as mutual combatants and, paradoxically, as “twins.” The hostile overlap at the Gothic threshold unsettles the modern stance, placing the reader awkwardly on two very different footholds.

The subjective experience at the meeting of dark and light at the threshold inspire that other foundation of Gothic fiction, terror. This terror is the terror of the modern who is disinclined towards superstition and yet is placed on the edge of

modernity and the ancient so as to doubt the assumptions of modernity—creating an uncomfortable fluctuation between “superstitious” fear and skepticism.

A helpful concept for thinking about the complex nature of Gothic thresholds is *Janus*, the Roman god of doors, doorways, gates, beginnings, and endings. Janus was typically represented as a single entity having two faces looking in opposite directions, and he came to symbolize liminality and the transition within oppositions—such as from the past to the future, childhood to maturity, and one world to another. On the threshold, one’s perspective determines whether the threshold is an entrance or an exit, whether it is the beginning or ending of the outside or inside, and whether an impediment at the threshold prevents intrusion or escape.

Gothic fiction places its reader on a transitional point between the modern and the medieval. The subjective self being placed on the Gothic threshold activates the Gothic experience and the self becomes Janus-like, a single entity with two faces looking in opposite directions, so that the ancient and the modern are experienced simultaneously. The Janus-perspective is an altered, frightening look at these distinct opposites as distinct yet merging—in a liminal state of paradox in which opposites exist simultaneously within the single perspective as concurrent, contradictory truths—and contradictory fears:

Two fears dominate this Gothic world, the fear of terrible separateness and the fear of unity with some terrible Other. They are embodied in two classic formulas of the ghost story: the heroine’s terrifying discovery that she is all alone and her subsequent discovery that—horror of horrors!—she is *not* alone. (DeLamotte 22-3).⁸

⁸ Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

In this scenario, portraying the threshold stance of Gothic, the individual faces one fear only to experience then its opposite, demonstrating the inherent and paradoxical double-sidedness of the threshold experience which unnervingly “surrounds” the individual.

Related to this double-sided formula is the shock caused by the Gothic presentation of the stark difference of the primitive and dark world from the modern world—and then the shock caused by a realization of their intimacy and even unity. The shocking contrast between the two causes their suddenly revealed intimacy to be all the more shocking. The Gothic fear is a threshold fear of this “alien” yet intimate “Other.”

This double fear reveals the paradoxical structure of the Gothic threshold based on the Janus-faced perspective of simultaneous contrast and merger. The modern individual is both separate from the past and unavoidably interconnected with it, cut off from the past and intruded upon it, causing an interweaving of fear and enticement in relation to both the medieval and the modern. This complex experience places the modern reader in an extremely personal relation to the tensions and destabilization of the modern and medieval opposition.

Not only are medieval dangers present in the Gothic novel, but modern fears are represented in the form of ancient terrors. The Gothic fears may be of the ancient world, but they are simultaneously of the modern. The fear of ancient dominance is countered by the fear of being cut off from tradition. The stifling atmosphere of a benighted and superstitious culture is countered by the stifling modern atmosphere of unexciting knowledge and cramped imagination. Desires and fears directed towards

the ancient and modern become intertwined as in the Janus-faced perspective they are simultaneously contrasted and unified in their extremity. Any given perspective, item, incident, or truth can potentially be mirrored into the form of a paradox, as displayed in *Otranto*'s prefaces and story, because these are placed on the threshold of contradictory worlds with opposing strengths and values.

The *doppelgänger* or *double* motif introduced into the Gothic tradition via Hoffman and the German Romantics is a fitting extension and embodiment of the paradox at the Gothic threshold. In this motif the individual is “split” into two beings who are contradictory and yet “one.” The *doppelgänger* is a frightfully opposite yet connected counterpart to the “normal” one. This double self is a picture of the Janus-like “split” occurring in Walpole and later Gothic writers (and their readers) in their attempts to engage with the oppositions of the Gothic threshold.

In *The English Novel* Dorothy Van Ghent⁹ states that *Don Quixote* (1605, 2nd vol. 1615)¹⁰ is “marked and characterized by a perspectively organized extremism” existing within the range between the idealistic Quixote and the practical Sancho (15)—a relationship based on the modern/medieval opposition. Interestingly, James Beattie's ‘On Fable and Romance’ (1783),¹¹ written during the early years of the Gothic tradition, discusses *Don Quixote* as a transitional text moving from the old, medieval Romance to the modern Romance—the styles taken up by Walpole in his Gothic merger. Don Quixote is an old man who has spent excessive time reading the old medieval romances. His “squire” Sancho is reasonable and modern in contrast

⁹ *The English Novel: Form and Function*. New York; London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953.

¹⁰ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, London: Penguin, 2000 [1605, 2nd vol. 1615].

¹¹ “On Fable and Romance” in *Dissertations, Moral and Critical*, 3 vols., Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809 [1783].

with Quixote's medieval perspective and ideals. Van Ghent states that in the novel's "structural character" we "rediscover" in freshness the truth of the opposition between Quixote and Sancho (15). Gothic fiction is characterized by a similar perspectively organized extremism between the opposites of the modern and the medieval, and we are allowed to rediscover these in the form of a dynamic paradox perspective which causes the reader to linger in consideration and reconsideration at the frightening and unsettling transitional point.

The Gothic Tradition

Together, the prefaces of *Otranto* form a "threshold" in the incongruous unity of a hoax and confession side-by-side; together they participate in the ambivalent meeting and overlapping of the medieval and modern, revealing some of the complexity of that merger. Walpole himself becomes ambivalent in his roles as modern and medieval, and also in his allegiances. Thus the preface "threshold" of *Otranto* not only contains a discussion of the central Gothic threshold idea, its content and threshold form are involved in some of Walpole's more intricate performances of the idea. Looking back over the tradition of Gothic fiction towards *Otranto*, we see not only what the Gothic has become, but what it has always potentially been, as laid out in the dynamic of the Gothic threshold.

Walpole's pioneering tale understandably does not fully embody the complex idea expressed in the prefaces. In his second preface Walpole, with polished humility, admits as much:

As the public have applauded the attempt, the author must not say he was entirely unequal to the task he had undertaken: yet if the new route he has struck out shall have paved a road for men of brighter talents, he shall own with pleasure and modesty, that he was sensible the plan

was capable of receiving greater embellishments than his imagination of conduct of the passions could bestow on it. (8)

Otranto perhaps was not *entirely* successful in itself, but its *idea* was so thrilling, and the “game” of merging ancient and modern such fun to play, that the Gothic tradition followed as a task to be done.

For instance, one of Walpole’s early successors was Clara Reeve, with her tale *The Old English Baron* (1777). She states in her preface that she adopted what I have labeled the Gothic threshold:

This Story is the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the Ancient Romance and modern Novel. . . (3)

Reeve develops Walpole’s form—for instance she moves the setting of her tale closer to home, from the Continent to England. Nonetheless, she maintains the threshold idea, the essential part that captivated her most. As I have said, it is the *idea* of the Gothic threshold which most intrigued Gothic successors. Walpole’s story, she states, did not realize it, and demanded revision:

Had the story been kept within the utmost *verge* of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention. [...] I was both surprised and vexed to find the enchantment dissolved, which I wished might continue to the end of the book; and several of its readers have confessed the same disappointment to me: The beauties are so numerous, that we cannot bear the defects, but want it to be perfect in all respects. (4-5)

And so Reeve, like others in the tradition, attempted to *fine-tune* the balance of the threshold between the past and the modern to that most effective point wherein the two should meet. Of course the requirements for a “proper” balance depended on the individual and changed with time, resulting in varied developments in the tradition.

I have discussed how “Gothic” was a contested term. Watt says the same for the tradition:

‘Gothic’ fiction was far less a tradition with a generic identity and significance than a domain which was open to contest from the first, constituted or structured by the often antagonistic relations between different writers and works. (6)

I would argue that it was a genre that was contested and built up around the Gothic threshold idea. As with Reeve, later Gothic authors participated in Walpole’s merger of old and new, developing different approaches for performing this merger. The categories of modern and ancient could be modified and reconsidered by succeeding Gothic authors within different cultures. If the central Gothic dynamic is the meeting of ancient and modern, then a Gothic author’s appropriation of these terms and their understanding of the cultural meaning determine the content of this meeting.

Individual Gothic works dealt with the ambivalence of the Gothic threshold, and different authors and works influenced one another and conflicted on this threshold idea, developing a general generic ambivalence. Since all that is required in adopting Walpole’s Gothic style is that the merger be maintained in some form, this tradition became one of shifting, dynamic, oppositional mergers with a nonetheless recognizable structure. Though ambivalent, the Gothic genre was not empty of established content; it accumulated the materials of its embattled heritage, and cultural acquirements, such as the cosmic threshold concept and anti-Catholic elements.

Watt states that Walpole was more interested in the picturesque than the accurately historical (31), yet Walpole’s use of the picturesque was suggestive of a real engagement with the tensions of modernity’s relationship with the past, as

suggested by his preface discussion of the transitional time of the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-reformation. Because of Walpole's sustained flippancy displayed throughout *Otranto*, one can't say with certainty what Walpole was attempting, but his ambivalence set the stage for the various conflicts and reconfigurations in the Gothic tradition which followed. His frequent parody of Gothic elements fits in well with the paradoxical consideration of the medieval and modern on the Gothic threshold.

Reeve, as one of what Watt calls the "Loyalist" Gothic writers of the 1790s, presented an overall ideal picture of the "Gothic" not as ancient foreign empires but as England's noble heritage, while using the improbable and fantastic elements of the Romance sparingly and for the purpose of portraying Providence's approval of the country's hierarchical structure—not a chaotic force which unsettles order. This "Loyalist" depiction of the Gothic was in opposition to those who were presenting a less conservative image of England as a resistant, subversively free "Gothic" people who prized most of all their liberty (Watt 58). Reeve's adjustment of the excesses and flippancies of Walpole's Gothic balance were not merely aesthetic but also strongly political.

Despite the political agenda of the Loyalist Gothic writers, they still functioned within the Gothic threshold dynamic by engaging with the tensions existing between modernity and the past, particularly in reaction to the developments and philosophies of the French Revolution. Nonetheless they were opposed in some ways to others in the tradition, as Watt notes:

Writers of Loyalist Gothic romances modestly disavowed any claim after recognition that 'risk-takers' such as Walpole and Lewis sought, and, perhaps most significantly, they chose to

privilege the exemplary purpose of romance rather than exploit sensational material or provide narratives of suspense. (58)

In his novel *The Monk*,¹² Lewis explored and celebrated the horrifying extremes of what was considered by many disapproving critics to be a subversive German influence. Akin to Walpole, he drew freely and indiscriminately on vague and frightful cultural conceptions of the past.

Lewis and Radcliffe have been seen as opposed forces within the Gothic tradition, partly because Radcliffe pictured them that way in her essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826).¹³ Radcliffe’s Gothic works operated more by suggestion in contrast to the excessively shocking scenes in Lewis’s work. Radcliffe also famously concluded her tales by portraying the supernatural occurrences as rationally explained illusions.

Radcliffe and Lewis had their own literary followers and imitators, and the contests over the use of Walpole’s threshold became part of the Gothic tradition. During this time much imitation and sameness of plot in “Gothic” fiction was denounced by reviewers; in some cases this was true, but nonetheless there were divergent “schools” in the genre. The ambivalence and conflict of the early Gothic tradition of 1764 until the 1820s built up an accumulation of generic conventions with which succeeding authors would experiment (as Walpole’s ambivalent and internally contested *Otranto* had functioned for the early tradition).

One way of studying works from this Gothic tradition is to examine the significant instances of literal and conceptual thresholds. Literal thresholds might be

¹² *The Monk*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008 [1796].

¹³ “On the Supernatural in Poetry.” *The New Monthly Magazine*. 16:1 (1826): 145-52.

locked doors, unlockable doors, secret passages, paintings that ghosts can step through, etc. The conceptual thresholds, often overlapping the literal thresholds, are the meeting points of conceptual opposites grafted onto the opposition of the modern and the medieval.

Some thresholds built on the foundations of *Otranto* include Lewis's use in *The Monk* of walls and passageways to indicate boundaries between "modern" and "medieval" parts of the setting. Lewis also depicts disturbing juxtapositions of sexuality and death, as well as piety with immorality—which also serve as conceptual explorations of these dichotomies. Radcliffe developed exciting techniques of merging dark and light into the half-seen (along with sound and silence blending into an uncertain clamor), and she used castle walls in dividing the claustrophobic castle interior from the suggestive sublime landscape.

It is fascinating to study what varied uses different authors throughout the tradition made of the Gothic threshold. For instance, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Brontës' *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)—though quite diverse and altogether spanning a century—all spend significant time at the point between two opposite realities, and this threshold provides an essential part of their settings, plots, and characters. All of these works are listed in the first review of *Dracula*¹⁴ as of the same family of fiction, including the misspelled "Marjery of Quether" (which I will examine in my fourth chapter). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, set in 1584, a young girl, effectively "modern," is imprisoned within an ancient castle (which of course retains its utter ancientness) by a feudal-type domineering villain. In *Frankenstein*, the protagonist,

¹⁴ Published in the *Daily Mail*, 1 June 1897.

raised at a distant from centers of learning, is dramatically told upon arrival at university that all of the books he has been studying are of the ancient “science” of alchemy, anachronisms in the world of modern science. He then studies this modern science, when, seemingly in confluence with his archaic earlier education, results in a both scientific and “magical” monstrous living corpse existing at the meeting place of death and life. In *Wuthering Heights* the two homes which provide the bifurcated structure of the entire novel are contrasted as modern and ancient. In *Dracula*, the modern man enters the ancient world of the vampire only to have the vampire then visit his modern world. These and other authors constructed various thresholds in the form of abnormal monsters, the hero-villain, the *doppelgänger*, and other Gothic conventions related to incongruous mixtures.

Though many authors throughout the Gothic tradition produced what might be considered “cheap” variations on the Gothic merger, others developed the Gothic threshold idea into conceptually startling and profound fiction. Perhaps the lesser works merely reproduced the more obvious aspects of its merger, while the better works tapped into the complexity of the threshold idea as a meeting and merging of modern and ancient at a frightening threshold in which they are ambivalently both starkly contrasted and merged as a dynamic paradox.

In this study I will be exploring what Baring-Gould made of the Gothic threshold. I believe that Baring-Gould, though little recognized today, was an author who explored the profundity of the Gothic threshold idea. In the next part of this introduction I will introduce him and his religious beliefs, which were fundamental in his use of the Gothic tradition and the Gothic threshold.

Introduction

Part II: The Good Mr. Baring-Gould

‘Are you’ a lady is reported to have asked, upon being introduced ‘the good Mr. Baring-Gould who writes such beautiful sermons, or the other Mr. Baring-Gould who writes novels?’ It is very much in character that his reply was silence. He could with truth have said that the poet, antiquarian, preacher and historian, as well as that mysterious ‘other’, were all to be found within the one personality. (Purcell, *Onward Christian Soldier*, 2)

Those in recent years who have stumbled upon the once-renowned Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) must be struck by the profuse and often seemingly contradictory roles taken up by this one Victorian. He was an Anglo-Catholic parson, squire, novelist, hagiographer, historian, hymn writer, archeologist, amateur architect, collector of folklore and folksongs, and author of travel-guides. This *squarson*—a portmanteau word describing that rare and fascinating individual who is both squire and parson—seems as if he was an erratic assemblage of numerous “other” Mr. Baring-Goulds.

The multifaceted Baring-Gould was born in Exeter in 1834 to a family of the rural gentry who held the estate of Lew Trenchard¹ in Devon. His father was a former army lieutenant, injured in his prime, and with an incurable thirst for travel and exploration. As a result Sabine grew up mostly on the Continent, traveling hither and thither according to his father’s whim. Sabine’s erratic and informal education gave him a curious bend of mind. Nonetheless, he eventually studied at Cambridge, and afterwards took holy orders. He later inherited the role of squire and eventually became both squire and parson of Lew Trenchard. He spent the rest of his life

¹ Also spelled “Lewtrenchard.”

fulfilling his three chief purposes in life, determined as a boy: to restore Lew manor, to restore Lew Church, and to revitalize the spiritual life of the Lew community.

Baring-Gould was among the most eccentric Victorian celebrities (quite an accomplishment), and his daunting literary output (over 500 publications) remains as an expression of his many and varied pursuits. For example, Baring-Gould wrote *Iceland: Its Scenes and Sagas* (1863), *The Book of Were-Wolves* (1865), *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1866-68), a sixteen-volume reference collection *The Lives of the Saints* (1872-77), “How to Save Fuel” (1874), *Yorkshire Oddities, Incidents, and Strange Events* (1874), many compilations of his sermons including *Village Preaching for a Year* (1875), a folksong collection *Songs and Ballads of the West* (1889), *The Tragedy of the Caesars* (1892), *Cliff Castles and Cave Dwellings in Europe* (1911), and his ghost-story collection *A Book of Ghosts* (1904).

Baring-Gould loved to tell stories. He was most famous for his novels and short stories, each charmingly crammed with references to his numerous interests. Indeed, all of his writing is laid out with the tact of a story-teller—including his histories, sermons, and even hymns (consider his famous “Onward Christian Soldiers”).

Yet for all his writing, Baring-Gould very seldom bothered to write about himself. Even his autobiographies, *Early Reminiscences, 1834 to 1864* (1924)² and *Further Reminiscences, 1864 to 1894* (published posthumously in 1925),³ leave his complicated inner workings an enigma, tending instead to discuss the multitude of

² *Early Reminiscences: 1834-1864*, London: John Lane, 1923.

³ *Further Reminiscences, 1864-1894*, London: John Lane, 1925.

things that interested him. The man remains an enticing riddle to be pondered through his writing.⁴

As indicated in the opening quotation about “the good Mr. Baring-Gould” and the “other,” the most obvious contradictions in Baring-Gould involved his religious self. John Fowles notes “a tension in the bizarre schism [...] between Baring-Gould’s fastidious religious self and the one that lovingly collected the more gruesome, supernatural and sadistic material of the folklorist” (x).⁵ David Roberts remarks on a “paradox” at the center of the strange parson’s mind, the “constant tension in Baring-Gould between the rational and the supernatural, the skeptic and the romantic, the Christian and (despite his calling) the pagan” (n. pag.).⁶ Indeed, there would seem to be a strange tension in Baring-Gould, who championed scientific progress, wrote generally orthodox religious works aligned with the Oxford Movement, and produced novels regularly filled with the dark themes of Gothic fiction and borrowings from macabre, eerie folklore.

Consider, for instance, the Darwin-influenced, Hegelian-inspired *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* (1869-70)⁷ alongside the Gothic novel *Mehalah* (1880)⁸; they hardly seem, at first glance, to be drawn from the same mind. *Origin* aims to be rigidly objective and scientific, while *Mehalah* belongs to a genre that

⁴ A third autobiographical work, covering the final years of his life, was at least partially written. Sadly it has not been found. Perhaps it received water damage and was subsequently burned, or perhaps it was purposely destroyed.

⁵ Introduction, *Mehalah: A Story of the Salt Marshes*, by Sabine Baring-Gould, London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1969.

⁶ “His ‘Magpie Mind’ Made Baring-Gould a Rare Bird Indeed,” *Smithsonian*. Smithsonian Institution, 24.4 (July 1993). Web. *AccessMyLibrary*.

⁷ *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief: Part I: Heathenism and Mosaism*, London: Rivingtons, 1869. *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief: Part II: Christianity*, London: Rivingtons, 1870.

⁸ *Mehalah: A Story of the Salt Marshes*, Introduction by John Fowles, London: Chatto & Windus Ltd. 1969 [1880].

engages essentially with the subjective and fantastic. Yet these disparate texts meet at that mysterious threshold which is Baring-Gould himself.

Origin is a philosophical study of the “religious instincts of humanity,” an argument of how Christianity satisfies these instincts, and a discussion of the pitfalls involved (*Origin*, Part I, xvi).

Mehalah is the story of a young woman living in the Essex Marshland near the end of the eighteenth century. It contains prominent Gothic details such as eerie legends, murder, a ghost, a despotic hero-villain, and a strange castle-like house containing an imprisoned, mad family member. Reviewers criticized the novel for its gloominess and lack of moral. Swinburne and others drew just comparisons to *Wuthering Heights*. In many ways *Mehalah* seems to be a non-religious or even anti-religious book. Fowles states that:

The two Church of England clergymen who briefly appear in it are treated with a contempt bordering on disgust; the wedding ceremony at Virley Church is done with a sarcastic virulence more to be expected from a militant atheist than an ordained minister from the next parish. (*Mehalah*, x)

Despite their striking differences, *Origin* and *Mehalah* do have a relation: each, in its own way, deals with self-development and religious development. *Origin* traces the history of religious development and then parallels this philosophically with an individual’s religious development. *Mehalah* narrates a young woman’s attempts to navigate her spiritual pursuit of the transcendent through the choice of two opposite suitors. Her Gothic experience takes place on a symbolic marshland threshold of land and sea.

As I have said, the most obvious “tensions” and “paradoxes” in Baring-Gould involve his religion. Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss Baring-Gould’s religious

thinking as outlined in *Origin*, and in the next I will consider *Origin* and its philosophy in relation to the varied and evolving construction of the Gothic threshold throughout the first half of *Mehalah*.

A Non-Religious Book about Religion

Origin is a book about religion, “written from a philosophic, and not from a religious point of view” (*Origin*, Part I, xv). By “philosophic,” Baring-Gould means that he will operate within a strict objective framework, restraining as much as possible the assumptions of his own personal religious convictions. He states, however, that *total* objectivity cannot be accomplished and should not be pursued:

Every man has his convictions of what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false, and can never be wholly unprejudiced in his estimates. A man without convictions is a man without judgment. I can frankly say, that I have tried to appreciate the various religions that come under review with impartiality. (*Origin*, Part I, xv).

In accordance with his goal of objectivity he will forgo religious assumptions about the existence of God and the validity of divine revelation. He argues that such an approach had become necessary because the Protestant rejection of a centralized ecclesiastical authority, and the more recent textual analysis of the Bible, had lowered the modern individual’s trust in these erstwhile religious foundations of Church and Book. “The inadequacy of either support has been repeatedly demonstrated, and as the props have been withdrawn, the faith of many has fallen with a crash” (*Origin*, Part II, vii).

Here Baring-Gould refers in part to a period of time, ten years earlier, that could be considered the heart of Victorian religious controversy: the disquieting

publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859),⁹ followed four months later by an even greater disturbance over *Essays and Reviews* (1860),¹⁰ a collection of seven essays in which its authors discussed controversial religious ideas such as Biblical higher criticism and other modern challenges to traditional religious thinking. These works had shaken or at least complicated trust in the Bible and orthodox Christianity for many Britons. Baring-Gould says frankly that *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* resulted from his own struggles:

I may call this book the history of my own religious difficulties and searchings after the truth. That these difficulties are shared by thousands in England and abroad, I am well aware; that my book may produce conviction and rest in other minds is my highest aim. (*Origin*, Part 2, xii)

Baring-Gould asserts that the modern apologist must look beyond the traditional resources of “Revelation” to buttress belief and persuade the intellect in favor of religion. For the benefit of a skeptical audience, Baring-Gould seeks a “Revelation” in the consciousness of man, stating that “[u]nless Theology can be based on facts anterior to text or society, to facts in our own nature, ever new, but also ever old, it can never be placed in an unassailable position,” and, “if Christianity be true, it must be true to human nature and to human thought” (*Origin*, Part II, vii-viii, ix). The objective *Origin* does not go many words without acknowledging the value of subjective experience, in which it will ground its religious claim.

Starting from a basic concept—“Force is that which produces or resists motion” (*Origin*, Part I, 1)—Baring-Gould discusses how force is essential in the

⁹ *On the Origin of Species*, reprint of 1st ed., London: Watts, 1950 [1859].

¹⁰ *Essays and Reviews*, 5th ed., London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861 [1860].

evolution of a given form to a more complex form, and in the maintenance and development of that form. Force is required to transform elements to compounds, compounds to vegetable life, and vegetable to animal. Force operates, in a highly complex manner, in mental activity.

In this opening chapter of minute scientific discussion, Baring-Gould narrates the gradual evolution by which nature becomes aware of itself in man's consciousness. In self-aware man, he explains, the expenditure of force becomes, in part, *conscious*. Force can now be purposely directed towards maintenance, development, and progression. For instance, a conscious person can direct force towards the developing of physical or mental strength; showing or restraining emotion; hurting or hindering; building social ties; developing a skill; creating something; and any number of other areas.

In the second chapter, Baring-Gould states that an instinct is the innate knowledge that guides an organism towards self-preservation and self-propagation. Each instinct is proper to the organism that possesses it. Baring-Gould states that one development does not negate a prior development; for example, a man does not cease to be animal—or plant-like, or composed of compounds and elements—just because he develops a mental dimension and consciousness. Because of this layered development, man is *axial*, having multiple poles or “centres of attraction” (*Origin*, Part I, 43). These centers have their own instincts, and are at times contradictory. A person's conscious choice works within these contradictory centers and can give attention and development to one over another.

The spiritual consciousness, innately contradictory, causes man to develop spiritually as a middle figure towards contradictory absolutes: causes and eventual effects. From this point, man pursues beginnings and the endings, the smallest and the largest, the lowest and the highest, the finite and the infinite—to seek that which has caused him, and to seek the perfection of himself.

For the rest of the book Baring-Gould considers the spiritual and religious “instincts” of humanity as revealed by a consideration of the world’s religious developments (chapter titles include “The Origin of Polytheism,” “Idolatry,” “The Origin of Monotheism,” “Asceticism and Mysticism,” “The Human Ideals”). He states that religious development, like human development, is a gradual process generating contradictory “centers.”

As we light on these religious embryos in all their stages of progression, we are startled at their monstrosity. But whence this monstrosity? The incompleteness of the work. Here the doctrine of sin has forced the sacrificial ritual into frightful exaggeration, there the doctrine of election has atrophied all independence of action. Here Nature is busy perfecting the emotional phase of religion, and there she is engaged upon intellectual elaboration. (*Origin*, Part I, 113)

Religious movements develop in response to what has developed before, and thus, back and forth, one development will emphasize one aspect while another development moves toward its opposite.

The Origin and Development of Religious Belief directly addresses the disturbance created by *On the Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews* by applying an evolutionary scheme to a *partially* materialist consideration of religious development. The first volume of *Origin* details the religious development of man as a pressing towards the extremes of his contradictory nature and thereby towards the absolute; the second volume argues that Christianity is both the culmination of this

development and its fulfillment. Only the authentic version of Christianity will properly harmonize these developments, of course, and as the text develops, it becomes more and more obviously a Tractarian argument.

Baring-Gould's philosophy was formulated within his association with the Oxford Movement, so I will take a moment to explain the movement and Baring-Gould's active involvement in it.

Baring-Gould and the Oxford Movement

In 1833, Anglican clergyman John Keble (1792-1866) read a sermon in Oxford entitled "National Apostasy", in which he declared that the Anglican Church had lost its identity and power by becoming secular, indifferent to doctrine, and spirituality torpid. This sermon was the opening salvo of a school of thought that had been developing amongst a core group of clergymen and academics in the conservative atmosphere of early nineteenth-century Oxford. The aim of this Oxford Movement was the dramatic reformation of the Anglican Church.

The Oxford Movement had roots in both the fervent religion of the Evangelical movement and the High Church party. It had several leaders with connections to the Evangelical movement and even some who had experienced Evangelical conversions (for instance, John Henry Newman [1801-90]). The High-Church element directed its members to look for the exemplar church not only, as the Evangelicals did, in the "primitive" early Church, but also in the later development of that Church, including the rich Catholic tradition of the Anglican Church.

High Church members, traditionally more upper-class, valued traditions that were connected in the popular mind to the Roman Catholic Church—including reverential, ceremonial church services emphasizing the sacraments and the vital role of the priesthood. High Church members cherished this style of service as part of their cultural tradition. By the nineteenth century, High Church was normally thought of as elaborate yet lacking any strong religious sentiment (“high and dry”). Conversely, Tractarians were interested in creating a disturbance throughout the entire Anglican Church by unlocking deep Catholic truths. Their High Church preferences were joined with passion for reform and earnest theological exploration.

Those in the Oxford Movement considered the true Church to be the Catholic Church, descended in direct apostolic line from the first church. In analyzing the Anglican history, they considered the Anglican Church to be a branch of that Catholic Church (along with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy). Thus the Anglican Church was a divinely founded, divinely empowered institution, transmitting the power of the mediating Incarnation of Christ to mankind through teaching and the sacraments. Tractarians gave great importance to their connection to the past.

Tractarians connected the overall negative influence of the Age of Reason with the influence of excessive Protestantism. Generally, they understood Anglican Catholicism as a reformed Catholicism, a correction of Roman Catholic errors while avoiding the excesses of the Protestant Reformation. It was, as the Caroline Divines, and later Newman, explained it, a *via media* (“middle way”) between the Scylla and Charybdis of two opposed forms of religious over-exaggeration.

In reaction to what they saw as an over-emphasis on reason, Tractarianism sought to reestablish the mysterious, mystical religion associated with Roman Catholic and medieval Anglican churches. The medieval church was often referred to as a British church that was aesthetically and doctrinally Catholic. Thus the Tractarians sought to restore the traditional and Catholic aspects of the Church in both liturgy and form.

The movement gained the initially derogatory name “Tractarianism” from its popular association with the series *Tracts for the Times*, written mostly by John Henry Newman. These tracts questioned what had become common understandings about Anglicanism, and offered Catholicism as the truth that had been forgotten.

Naturally, Tractarians were often caricatured as silly imitators of “Romish” ritual and other vestments of “Popery.” The Roman Catholic Church was considered by a great many Britons to be not only an enemy of the Anglican Church, but of the nation as well, so the Tractarians were thought of as naive or conscious traitors who secretly served an enemy Pope and his church. The majority associated Popery with a fearful reversion to a superstitious, controlled, and benighted past. The Tractarians fight to restore a heritage of the past amidst such resistance was a difficult one.

Though generally unpopular and a target for suspicion, the Oxford Movement faced an increased level of controversy after the publication of *Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1841), better known as *Tract 90*. In this tract Newman argued that the core Anglican doctrine of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of*

Religion (1563) was compatible with the Roman Catholic creed.¹¹ Naturally, *Tract 90* incited more accusations of Popery. Newman later questioned the *via media* and eventually joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. Newman's conversion was not controversial; rather, it was quiet, and a relief to both sides. Some other Tractarians followed. These transfers of allegiance were considered by many to be a vindication of charges of Popery. In 1850 anti-Catholic vitriol against "popery" and Anglo-Catholics surged again in response to the "Papal Aggression," when Pope Pius IX re-established a Roman Catholic hierarchy of bishops in England.

The names Oxford Movement and Tractarianism are sometimes applied only to the time from Keble's sermon in 1833 to Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845. The movement nevertheless had a "second wave" in the latter half of the century. At this time many Anglo-Catholics retreated in a quiet diffusion to the countryside and slums to practice and teach the Catholic faith. Here the movement developed in various and layered ways.

One development was an increased emphasis on medieval, mystic decoration and ritual of the "Ritualists." This derogatory term was often applied to all Tractarians in the latter nineteenth century, but it applies more specifically to those who focused primarily on the use of pre-Reformation ornamentation and ritual in church services.

Another second-wave development was the continued study and development of the beliefs of the Oxford Movement, including more consideration of these beliefs

¹¹ The *Articles* were originally an attempt to define the Church of England in relation to the extremes of Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. Newman saw the *Articles* as a statement of reformed Catholicism—a *via media* between the extremes of Popery and Protestantism.

in relation to modern issues. A social development of the second wave was a push to regenerate the lives and religion of the poor in the countryside and slums.

Baring-Gould belonged to this second wave of the Oxford Movement. He was only a child during the first. Bickford Dickinson tells us that his family “seem to have been Evangelical Low Churchmen,” including his father, but his beloved mother

practiced Christianity after the old High Church tradition and regulated her life by a fixed timetable of prayer, almsgiving and good works. Sabine was undoubtedly influenced by her teaching and example, by his natural love of dignified and traditional ceremonial and by his dislike of the Lutheran form of worship that he had encountered on his travels. (28-9)¹²

These travels were the Continental trips on which his nomadic father would take the family. “Between the ages of three and sixteen [1837-1850] he spent less than three years in his native land” (Dickinson 16). During these important years Baring-Gould developed a preference for Roman Catholic cultures and a severe distaste for Protestantism.

By the time that he went to Cambridge he was ready to be caught up in the second wave of the Tractarian Movement that was then sweeping the universities, despite the hostility of the press and of the Government... (Dickinson 29)

While at Cambridge Baring-Gould quickly developed his Tractarian views, becoming known as a pious rebel against the religious status quo. Another of Baring-Gould’s contradictions is that he was both anti-establishment and pro-establishment—drawn to the often-reviled, splinter group of the Tractarians, yet, as part of this movement, devoted to the “true” Catholic, Anglican Church standing strong amidst straying Dissenters and misguided Roman Catholics.

Baring-Gould joined Clare College at Cambridge in 1853 at the age of nineteen; he earned his Bachelor of Arts in 1857 and then his Master of Arts in 1860.

¹² *Sabine Baring-Gould: Squarson, Writer, and Folklorist, 1834-1924*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970.

As his university days drew to a close, Baring-Gould was unsure of what he would do next. His desire to enter the priesthood was met by his father's refusal—and serious threats of disinheritance—on the grounds that the first-born son was to be the squire of Lew Trenchard, not its parson. That role was to go to his younger brother William.

During this difficult time Baring-Gould worked when he could as a layman volunteer, teaching in the choir school, at Anglo-Catholic Charles Lowder's (1820-1880) parish of St. Barnabas in Pimlico, London. He had tremendous admiration for Lowder, who worked in the slums of east London, serving the poor and introducing the community to Ritualist forms of worship.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a difficult one for Anglo-Catholics. This was the time of unruly protests in East London against "Ritualism." For instance, there were service disturbances at St Barnabas and St George-in-the-East from 1859 to 1860. Baring-Gould witnessed these riots and endured aggressive protesters during his time at St. Barnabas.

Like many other Anglo-Catholic priests of the time, Baring-Gould spent his clerical life amongst the lower classes of rural England. His first positions as curate and rector were in the factory towns and villages of Yorkshire. He then worked as rector in the rural marshland of Essex, before returning to Devon to serve the remainder of his life as rector for the family church.

Baring-Gould's first works were published while he was at Cambridge, but he began serious writing and publishing a few years later in 1863, at the age of twenty-nine. At this time he was a schoolteacher at Hurstpierpoint College in west Sussex.¹³

¹³ Baring-Gould was a teacher at Hurstpierpoint for a few years. He would amuse the students with his enrapturing story-telling skills. He also wrote stories and articles for the school paper. Apparently he

Later, while rector at Dalton in Yorkshire in 1869, at the age of thirty-five, he published the first volume of *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, his first work to detail his particular religious ideas.

The Oxford Movement was a merger of various movements, and Baring-Gould crafted his own unique understanding of Anglo-Catholic philosophy when he combined it with the fruits of his studies in continental philosophy. Though not immediately apparent, one discovers by the second volume of *Origin* that scientific theories, comparative religious study, and the rest are functioning as auxiliaries to the grand theory which transformed Baring-Gould's thinking—the dialectic of Hegel (1770-1831).

Baring-Gould does not concur with the materialist and atheistic conclusion of the Left Hegelians, though he expresses “a debt of inestimable gratitude” to Feuerbach (*Origin*, Part II, xii). One notices that Baring-Gould derives a Catholic pleasure in finding inspiration in those with whom he does not fully agree, whether they were an atheist like Feuerbach or a Calvinist pastor.¹⁴ He also ultimately disagrees with Hegel, who, Baring-Gould asserts, was “unfaithful to his own theory, and erected that very theory into the Absolute,” possibly referring to the maneuver found in the penultimate chapter of *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807)¹⁵ which could be interpreted as Hegel compressing the

dressed as a Ruskin-esque dandy at the time. One of the anecdotes regarding Baring-Gould's eccentricity takes place at Hurstpierpoint. Apparently, for a time he wore a pet bat on his shoulder while teaching.

¹⁴ “Especially am I indebted to one of the most original thinkers of the Galilean Church, the Abbe Gabriel, especially for much in Chap. II., also to the Calvinist pastor, M. Charles Secretan, to the Chevalier Bunsen, to M. Thiercelin, to M. de Strada, and to several of the German Hegelianists on the right and on the left.” (*Origin*, Part II, xii)

¹⁵ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Tr. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977 [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807].

spiritual/physical division into the mind of humanity (*Origin*, Part II, 29). Baring-Gould interprets this eleventh-hour act as a jettisoning of truth, not a conciliation of it, and therefore a betrayal of Hegel's own aspiration towards total inclusivity. Left Hegelians interpreted Hegel's philosophy as materialist, while Right Hegelians understood it as relatively orthodox Christian; Baring-Gould was among those who saw Hegel's philosophy as ultimately materialistic, and he rejected Hegel's materialist conclusions.¹⁶

Most important to Baring-Gould were not the various conclusions drawn by Hegel and his followers, but Hegel's concept of the universal dialectic, the soundness of which he believed in completely.

In *Origin*, Baring-Gould outlines his understanding of the dialectic as follows. What we perceive as reality is, using Kantian terms, "the forms of our intelligence applied by us to phenomena" (*Origin*, Part I, 287). Thus existence, as we are able to know it, is based on our own consciousness. Furthermore, any idea that is thought by that consciousness exists intrinsically as a synthesis of a contradictory thesis and antithesis:

The idea has three elements, conditions, or moments. It *is* and *is not* at one and the same time, because it *becomes*. This contradiction is the basis of its being; it is the fulcrum of a lever, of which one pole is force, the other not force. It exists in and for itself, having two moments equally opposed, the idea *in itself*, and the idea *out of itself*. Consciousness existing in the soul is thrown into contact with the not-I, and the idea elicited by the contact is thought. (*Origin*, Part I, 288)

¹⁶ The first English work to directly address Hegel was *The Secret of Hegel* (1865) by James Hutchison Stirling. Baring-Gould's *Origin* was published soon after, and it is likely, given his obvious extensive reading of Hegel and his followers, that Baring-Gould read Hegelian works in the original language before Stirling's work.

Ideas have “consequently opposite extremes, betwixt which exists a point which conciliates them.” By *conciliation*, Baring-Gould means the synthesis of *antinomies*, contradictory truths.

This contradiction-based consciousness can only obliquely consider an absolute extreme (that which contains no contradiction) by referencing its opposite, because contradiction of some sort is necessary for thought. Absolute extremes of any sort, like absolute hot and absolute cold, are opposite poles and yet within themselves the same (e.g. if all were the same temperature, nothing could be distinguished because that would require a relation of difference). Only in contradiction can consciousness occur; that is, consciousness exists only in a state of becoming between the poles of the absolute. Consciousness is double-faced, a merging threshold always simultaneously considering opposite extremes.

Likewise, in the historical development of human thought, an idea can never be fixed or stable; it is always in development. Ideally, opposing thoughts are conciliated into a unity (thesis and antithesis into synthesis) towards the all-encompassing unity of the absolute. Ever approaching absoluteness, humanity and the individual become freer and freer in their work of conciliation, in an eternal movement towards an ideal which can be ever re-envisioned as the next synthesis (*Origin*, Part I, 287-289). This process is eternal because of the infinite distance to the absolute.

Baring-Gould argues that some conception of an ultimate Ideal Being is required to give direction and centering for the conciliation of the myriad contradictions of reality. This Being is the Absolute, the breadth and zenith of all

development, transcending the dialectical existence. From the dialectical perspective the Absolute can only be perceived as an absolute unity which in that perspective is equivalent to nothingness. Objective thinking can define the Absolute only in a series of negative attributes, and therefore there is no connection between this negative idea of the Absolute and the pursued human ideal. Mankind can only connect to the Absolute “by an intermediary, a mediator between Him and us” (*Origin*, Part II, 29). This mediator is Christ, the immediate yet eternally transcendent Ideal who exists as the foundational conciliation between the finite and the infinite.

So in Baring-Gould’s central philosophy in *Origin* are combined the Oxford Movement and Hegelianism—or at least his own particular modifications of both, for Baring-Gould’s beliefs were heated by passionate study and reworked through his imagination. To his way of thinking, Anglo-Catholicism and Hegelianism are two ways of seeing the same truth. If God, the Absolute, through the ideal Christ, is the conciliator of all truth, then

Catholicism is therefore necessarily the synthesis, in its universal and indivisible unity, of all fragmentary truths contained in every philosopheme and religion, theory and rite, hitherto opposed; of all the thoughts, wills, and sentiments of the human race, thus harmonizing man’s nature within himself, where hitherto there was antagonism; uniting all men, one with another, where there was discord; and attaching all humanity to God.

It holds together indivisibly all aspects of the many-faced individual and collective life of mankind by its Ideal, who, being simultaneously love, knowledge, and activity, responds at once to all the faculties and all the harmonies of the heart, the reason and the will, concluding all in infinite charity, absolute verity, and supreme happiness. (*Origin*, Part II, 148-9)

Baring-Gould argues that Christianity—as realized in Catholicism and explained by Hegelianism—satisfies all the various and contradictory impulses of man, conciliating man to himself, to his fellow man, and to the infinite God. By way of the first and last Idea, the Incarnate God, the individual becomes the conciliating threshold of his internal antinomies (e.g. rational and sentimental), and God through

the Church becomes the conciliating threshold of conflicting groups of thought. The internal “Revelation” of man is the dialectic, and the point of evolutionary progress is infinitely expansive conciliation.

Thus Catholicism answers the requirements of *Origin*’s first volume, harmonizing the contradictory development of man and religion towards continued, infinite progress.

Baring-Gould’s philosophy integrated the contradictions of his diverse interests, be they gruesome folklore, pagan religious practices, ancient myths, scientific discovery, artistic expression, Christian tradition, or progressive social reform. He writes that each of these forms of truth, when placed in proper relation to the Absolute, can be seen as contradictory yet harmonious radiations of Truth. He celebrates paradox as the basis of thought and being, and the salvation of mankind.

In its opposition to conciliation, the *negation* of truth is sin and error. By negation, Baring-Gould means the denial of one truth in favor of another. He terms preferring one truth to the exclusion of another as *specialization*. (So, for instance, he argues that Calvinists specialize predestination and thereby negate free-will, that Lutherans specialize faith and thereby negate good works, and that materialists specialize the finite and negate the spiritual.) Specialization and negation attempt to create an artificial unity by exalting one side of an antinomy as a whole in itself, when it actually requires its opposite for its own existence. This act transforms antinomy into antagonism.

Baring-Gould states that every truth that has ever been genuinely felt to be true *is* true; even the most incomprehensible belief should be accepted—once placed

in relation to every other truth. Any truth which seems contradictory to another, like scientific discovery and religious dogma, can and should be harmonized. In *Origin* Baring-Gould practices this idea by engaging with the theory of evolution and controversial religious theories, drawing them into the fabric of his orthodox argument. He wanted to show how religion could evolve and yet remain the same in a conciliation of past and present, retaining the old truths while conciliating them with new truths.

Certainly the most influential product of the second wave was *Lux Mundi* (1889),¹⁷ a collection of Tractarian essays edited by Charles Gore (1853-1932), a leading Anglo-Catholic theologian and Bishop of Oxford and the new diocese of Birmingham. This text became well-known as a Tractarian engagement with modern difficulties, difficulties associated, for instance, with the controversial texts *On the Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews*. *Lux Mundi* theologians were willing to grapple with the theory of evolution, higher criticism of the Bible, and other controversial religious subjects. They attempted to conciliate such modern ideas with orthodox Christian views of the past.

The work's subtitle is "A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation.", and the writers' use of the Incarnation dogma employs continental philosophy—Hegelianism in particular. The approach of *Lux Mundi* was hugely influential on the Anglican Church and British theology, and was the prevailing theology of the Anglican Church until the end of World War II.

¹⁷ Charles Gore, ed., *Lux Mundi A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, 5th ed. London: Murray, 1890 [1889].

Baring-Gould was a Tractarian pioneer in many of the chief endeavors of the *Lux Mundi*. Though not generally recognized, Baring-Gould's *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, published twenty years before *Lux Mundi*, was an extremely likely predecessor and influence on this group of thinkers. The *Lux Mundi* scholars had worked together for years, and Baring-Gould's *Origin* had doubtless been read by all of them. Their ideas can regularly be traced as developments of *Origin* philosophy.

One of the few persons who have acknowledged the possibility of Baring-Gould's influence on *Lux Mundi* is the American Episcopalian James MacBride Sterrett (1847-1923). Sterrett, a Tractarian and Hegelian, considered Baring-Gould, along with the Oxford Hegelianist professor Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) to be *Lux Mundi*'s two major influences. He mentions Baring-Gould's influence in his *Reason and Authority in Religion* (1891).¹⁸ Though generally dismissive of Baring-Gould's philosophy, he does acknowledge its influence:

Since writing this chapter I have looked over again the curious book of S. Baring-Gould on "The Origin and Development of Religious Belief," which was startling when first read some twenty years ago. I find it now, as then, a queer hodge-podge of materialism and philosophy. The noteworthy thing about it, coming from an Anglo-Catholic, is its appeal to philosophy for vindication of the Christian religion, and especially its rapturous acceptance of Hegel's philosophy.

[...]

However ill-digested the materials which he worked up, and however imperfect his apprehension of Hegel's method, he at least did pioneer work in calling attention to Hegel as a master in philosophy. I doubt not that his work has been one of the influences making "*Lux Mundi*" possible in that quarter. It need scarcely be said that their work is more scholarly and devout. Their style is rather German-like, while his is quite French-like.

[...]

Dean Stanley's "*Christian Institutions*" is the elder brother of their volume [*Lux Mundi*]. It would be more correct, however, to call Baring-Gould's book the congenial precursor of "*Lux Mundi*." Dean Stanley's book so presents the historical environments as to make them seem to be the efficient cause and the just measure of the worth of Christian institutions. It lacks the philosophical element. (*Reason and Authority* 115fn, 164)

¹⁸ *Reason and Authority in Religion*. New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1891.

Baring-Gould was a pioneer in the Oxford Movement for engaging with modern religious difficulties by championing the conciliation of orthodox beliefs with modern assertions. He deemed that, in his day, different forms of truth were becoming more and more alienated from one another. The publication of such works as *On the Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews* had resulted over the years in an increased separation between scientific and historical study and traditional, orthodox religion. Schisms caused by their publication had not healed, but were rather widening. The Anglican Church remained divided by internal parties of High Church, Low Church, Broad Church, Evangelical, liberal, conservative, etc. Tractarians were experiencing particular and growing hostility from citizenry and the upper clergy.

Baring-Gould felt such schisms keenly. He was in some ways invested in the modern, progressive world of political and cultural reform, “the Gospel of Science,”¹⁹ and modern philosophical and religious ideas. He was equally (or perhaps even more) devoted to the older world of rural cultures, mysticism, the supernatural, orthodox Christianity and traditions of the past. He believed that his nation and Church desperately needed conciliation of contradictory impulses, and he saw that the Catholic Anglicans best able to lead this conciliation were being oppressed. To him, the modern establishment of truth involving negation was an utter evil and forebode evil days to come.

The fears of *Origin* can be perceived dimly in the Gothic shadows of *Mehalah* and *Margery of Quether* (1884).

¹⁹ See the introduction to Baring-Gould’s *Some Modern Difficulties: Nine Lectures*. London: W. Skeffington, 1875.

Mehalah and Margery of Quether

As a squarson Baring-Gould had a fascinating perspective on religious and social changes throughout the Victorian era. I will now discuss *Mehalah* and *Margery of Quether*, two works that provide a range within which to consider Baring-Gould's writing of Gothic fiction in a time when his roles as squire and parson were placing him under particular strain.

In the years leading up to *Mehalah*'s conception, though Baring-Gould had inherited the title of squire, he was working far from his family estate as a parson in Essex. In these years he anticipated the time he would move back to his estate once his uncle vacated the living. At the end of his ten-year stay at Mersea, Baring-Gould wrote what is arguably his masterpiece in fiction, the novel *Mehalah*. A year later his uncle died and he moved to Lew Trenchard to become the squarson.

Margery of Quether was written after this move. At this time Baring-Gould lived at the rectory at Lew Trenchard; because of financial strains, particularly resulting from the continuing Great Agricultural Depression, his manor house remained under lease. During this time he oversaw general reconstruction of the estate properties, began repairs on the manor, and waited for the time when he could move his family into the manor.

These two exemplary pieces of fiction written within Baring-Gould's anticipatory years as rector at East Mersea, and then his first few years as both squire and parson of Lew Trenchard, seem the proper focus for this study of Baring-Gould as "squarson." Using these two works as dual "centers," I am able to consider Baring-Gould's squarson experience in dynamic terms—as a measured movement

from parson in another county and “absentee” squire to that goal of squire and parson of Lew Trenchard.

Throughout the study I will consider Baring-Gould as both a parson and a squire, though the chapters on *Mehalah* will focus more on the parson role while the *Margery of Quether* chapter will focus more on the role of squire. I will be paying particular attention to these roles in relation to Baring-Gould’s use of the Gothic threshold.

Chapter One

***Mehalah*: The Development of Religious Belief in a Gothic World**

Between the mouths of the Blackwater and the Colne, on the east coast of Essex, lies an extensively marshy tract veined and freckled in every part with water. (*Mehalah* 1)

Baring-Gould's *Origin and Development of Religious Belief* led in a fairly direct way to the creation of *Mehalah*. Although denounced by several dissimilar groups,¹ *Origin* pleased Prime Minister Gladstone enough for him to offer Baring-Gould the Crown living of East Mersea in Essex. Baring-Gould accepted and was curate at East Mersea from 1871 to 1881. *Mehalah* was the major literary result of this ten-year appointment.

Purcell explains that Baring-Gould's time at Mersea was in many ways difficult:

He did not get on with the people: it is probable that they did not take to him. But then, they were not prone to warmth towards anyone; and the pastoral gift which Sabine undoubtedly had, and which made him loved, revered, and which keeps him still remembered in his native Devon, aroused no response in Mersea. Their favourite parson had been one who, engrossed in his garden, had left them undisturbed. A predecessor of his had had the ricks on his glebe burnt down by a dissenter. As it was, the only vaguely intelligent farmer in Sabine's time was of that persuasion.

Of social life there was scarcely any. Even ordinary visiting was made difficult on the mainland by the empty distances involved. Nor was there much in the immediate neighborhood of interest: the dull fields stretched level; barges arrived regularly laden with 'London muck', the offerings of the capital's street. Spread upon the land as manure, the revolting mixture stank to heaven. Even the very occupations of the people lacked drama: they tilled the land, or dredged sullenly for shrimps. (102-3)²

¹ Baring-Gould seems pleased to announce the "universal" range of his detractors: "The Roman 'Catholic World,' the high Anglican 'Church Review,' and the extreme Protestant 'Press and S. James' Chronicle' have agreed to denounce me as a gross materialist, a thorough rationalist, and an undisguised infidel." (*Origin*, Part II, xi)

² William Purcell, *Onward Christian Soldier: A Life of Sabine Baring-Gould, Parson, Squire, Novelist, Antiquary, 1834-1924*, Introduction by John Betjeman, Longmans, Green, 1957.

Furthermore, Baring-Gould found that the weather caused lung problems for him and his family. The chapter in his *Further Reminiscences* documenting his time at Mersea has the unflattering title “Ten Years on the Mud.”

Not long after arriving in Mersea, Baring-Gould had another reason to resent his location. In 1872, his father died, and he became squire of Lew Trenchard. Nonetheless, his uncle still held the living there, so Sabine remained in Mersea, though he was required to handle the family affairs.

Appropriately, then, *Mehalah*, as a rendering of Mersea life, based heavily on Baring-Gould’s experiences with the land, people, and culture, is a Gothic novel. *Mehalah* in fact makes fresh and effective use of the prototypical Gothic plot of the first wave of Gothic fiction. As I have argued, the Gothic tradition could be considered numerous “re-workings” of the Gothic threshold in *The Castle of Otranto*, and in *Mehalah* Baring-Gould reworks many elements of *Otranto*’s actual plot. In *Mehalah* a young, virtuous woman experiences terrifying situations while escaping a powerful male villain—a “feudal lord”—in his haunted Gothic “castle.” The character Mehalah is a “modern,” that is, the character through whom the modern relates to the story; she is also “modern” in relation to “ancient” terrors and villain. As I will discuss, the story also contains numerous and significant overlapping incidences of the “double” motif so popular in Victorian Gothic fiction.

In this chapter I will consider the various developments of *Mehalah*’s Gothic threshold as a conceptual threshold of freedom and restriction. In the next chapter I will discuss this threshold more particularly as a Gothic threshold involving the ancient and the modern.

The Marshland Structure

Mehalah: A Story of the Salt Marshes is tellingly named, being, like a good Gothic story, as much a story of its atmospheric setting as of its eponymous heroine—indeed, it is in many ways a story about the relationship between the two. William J. Hyde argues that Baring-Gould's writing was strongest when he was constructing his fictional worlds; for Baring-Gould, Hyde says, "setting came first" (2).³ Most of Baring-Gould's fiction takes place in rural England, and almost all of the detailed places and people in his novels had real-world equivalents or inspirations.

The mind of the writer of *Origin*, so sensitive to the subtleties of place, was saturated in the strange marshland of the Mersea Island region. For ten years, his Rectory windows framed a strikingly alien and uncongenial land seemingly oblivious to the advances of civilization; for ten years, thoughts on the setting and its people were jumbled up with Catholic theological musings and religious service.

Set near the close of the eighteenth century, around eighty years before Baring-Gould took up residence in Mersea, *Mehalah* opens by laying out an atmosphere ripe for Gothic happenings:

Between the mouths of the Blackwater and the Colne, on the east coast of Essex, lies an extensively marshy tract veined and freckled in every part with water. It is a wide waste of debatable ground contested by sea and land, subject to incessant incursions from the former, but stubbornly maintained by the latter. [...] The creeks, some of considerable length and breadth, extend many miles inland, and are arteries whence branches out a fibrous tissue of smaller channels, flushed with water twice in the twenty-four hours. At noon-tides, and especially at the equinoxes, the sea asserts its royalty over this vast region, and overflows the whole, leaving standing out of the flood only the long island of Mersea, and the lesser islet, called the Ray. [...] A more desolate region can scarce be conceived, and yet it is not without beauty. (1-2)

³ "The Stature of Baring-Gould as a Novelist," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15.1 (June 1960): 1-16.

This “debatable” landscape, contemplated for years by a parson with a fervent interest in the eerie, the Catholic Church, and Hegelianism, is in *Mehalah* presented as an unstable Gothic threshold, charged with dialectical significance.

According to Baring-Gould in *Origin*:

The world presents us with a picture of unity and distinction—unity without uniformity, and distinction without antagonism.

We may say that the law of the universe seems to be infinite analysis infinitely synthesized. There is universal antinomy, universally conciliated.

But when we examine man, a creature with free will, we find that he is capable of turning distinction into opposition, of making scission and separation; and then duality and contradiction again. (*Origin*, Part II, 22)

The narrator’s depiction of the East Mersea marshlands is a unity of dialectical opposition—yet something is off. A war of sorts is implied as each side struggles for dominance; the setting is “contested by sea and land.” In *Origin*, Baring-Gould states that the universe per se is without antagonism in its numerous antinomies—

attraction and repulsion [...] a centripetal and a centrifugal force [...] positive and negative electricity [...] light and darkness, movement and repose, force and matter, heat and cold, the one and the multiple [...].

Each contradiction is completely harmonized in universal synthesis (*Origin*, Part II, 23). Thus any antagonism of antinomies, not being present in antinomy itself, must be added during the subjective interpretation of reality. Man, gifted with a free-will, is able to specialize a thing and antagonistically “oppose” it to its opposite, thereby “break[ing] the order of the universe” and introducing “antagonism where there was only antinomy” (*Origin*, Part II, 22). The subjective attempt to comprehend the world can transform that world into a reflection of the incompleteness of the subjective self: “our [*imperfect*] forms of intelligence applied by us to phenomena” (*Origin*, Part, I 287).

If *Mehalah* is at all consistent with *Origin*, then the East Mersea marshland's antagonism of water and land must then be linked not to *its* reality, which is antinomy in a harmonious unity, but to the antagonizing interpretation of the setting by subjective beings; in other words, the antagonism comes from the people.

The setting is indeed a direct reflection of its people. The narrator neatly divides the marshland population into a people strongly associated with the land and a people strongly associated with the sea. The sea-people are the wild-blooded, turbulent fishermen and smugglers who “swarm” on the shores and live in “the tarred wreck-timber cabins by the sea just above the reach of the tide” (20). They are the “leavened” ones, the “mixed-breeds”—descendents of gypsies and foreign smugglers who intermarried with the indigene. Their roving ancestors found on the marshland coast an alluring “life of adventure, danger, and impermanence” (19).

Arriving “from the sea,” foreign peoples have overrun the region much like the marshland waters. In clear opposition to these colonists are the unchanging inland peasants:

in spite of this infusion of strange ichor⁴ from all sides, the agricultural peasant on the land remains unaltered, stamped out of the old unleavened dough of Saxon stolidity, forming a class apart from that of the farmers and that of the seamen, in intelligence, temperament, and gravitation. All he has derived from the French element which has washed about him has been a nasal twang in his pronunciation of English. (20)

These “land” peasants who work the earth are depicted as ploddingly resistant—“the Old East Saxon slow moving, never thinking, day labourers”—quite different from their turbulent counterparts on the coast. The novel's marshland, in both setting *and*

⁴ In Greek mythology, ichor is the blood of the gods, sometimes considered poisonous to mortals.

inhabitants, is “contested by sea and land, subject to incessant incursions from the former, but stubbornly maintained by the latter” (1).

Forming a contrasting part of the “Gallic invasion” is the influence of Huguenot refugees who arrived after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes. Unlike the gypsy and smuggler influence, these are said to have brought to the region a “Puritanic bitterness” and an energy which the narrator suggests may have built the region’s “long-extended sea-walls enclosing vast tracts of pasture” (*Mehalah* 19), an attempt to more strictly demarcate the ambivalent setting and enhance the solidity of the land for farming. I would argue that the Saxon peasantry and the “wild” gypsies and smugglers form the core dichotomy used by Baring-Gould to correspond to the dichotomy of freedom and restriction. The Huguenot descendants, as I will discuss later, are associated in the novel with the restrictiveness of the land people, though their restrictiveness is quite different, based on religious fervor and Calvinist principles.

Though unmistakably divided,”[t]he whole population of this region [is] more or less mixed up with, and interested in, this illicit traffic [smuggling illegal goods brought in through the web of waterways], and with defiance of the officers of the law” (19). The disparate peoples are united in general antagonism and corruption, from smuggler to parson. A man-of-war and other navy vessels hunt down and fight with smugglers, all while preparing for battle with France. *Mehalah* depicts conflict ranging through land and sea, a region where one is wise to carry a firearm on land or boat for the sake of self-preservation.

At the most basic conceptual level, the land and water opposition represents an antagonistic dialectic. The novel's more specific development of the opposition—and the dominant theme of the novel—is a battle between the sea as freedom and the land as restriction. This theme is a fitting foundation since *Mehalah* is a study of a young woman's development, and, as Baring-Gould postulates in *Origin*, "liberty is the first necessity of existence" (*Origin*, Part II, 55). The Gothic terrors of the novel relate to her fear of enclosure and restriction.

The Central Battle

Continuing from setting and populace, the opening characters and action of the story are yet a further and more sublimated extension of the battle between land and sea. On the Ray, a thin, gravel-hill island between the mainland and Mersea Island, within a small farmhouse, Elijah Rebow and Mehalah Sharland (nicknamed Glory) face each other from across the room, locked in an opposition of wills:

He leaned on his duck-gun, and glared from under his pent-house brows and thatch of black hair over the head of the old woman at a girl who stood behind, leaning on the back of her mother's chair, and who returned his stare with a look of defiance from her brown eyes (3).

They are a striking pair of combatants: he an intelligent yet cruel and unscrupulous middle-aged farmer (and chief smuggler) of considerable wealth and influence; she an unrefined, uneducated, yet noble young woman dressed in her usual, second-hand sailor's outfit of a blue Guernsey sweater and red cap. Both Elijah and Mehalah are full of fight, with fiery passions animating their expressions, particularly in contrast with Mehalah's invalid mother seated between them.

Elijah has recently purchased the Ray, including the Sharland's farm, solely for the purpose of becoming Mehalah's landlord. Speaking to Mehalah's mother while watching Mehalah closely, he revels maniacally in his newly acquired position:

"The Ray is mine," pursued Rebow, swelling with pride. "I have bought it with my own money—eight hundred pounds. I could stubb up the trees if I would. I could cart muck into the well and choke it if I would. I could pull down the stables and break them up for firewood if I chose. All here is mine, the Ray, the marshes, and the saltings, the creeks, the fleets, the farm. That is mine," said he, striking the wall with his gun, "and that is mine," dashing the butt end against the hearth; "and you are mine, and Glory is mine."

"That never," said the girl, stepping forward, and confronting him with dauntless eye and firm lips and folded arms.

"Eh! Gloriana! have I roused you?" exclaimed Elijah Rebow, with a flash of exultation in his fierce eyes. "I said that the house and the marshes, and the saltings are mine, I have bought them. And your mother and you are mine."

"Never," repeated the girl.

"But I say yes." (4-5)

Mehalah thrives in her life of freedom and so refutes Elijah's assertion with bitter vehemence. Her mother describes her as a "headlong child," who, "when she fares to say or do a thing, there is no staying tongue or hand" (5). Mehalah's robust, independent nature recoils violently against any attempts to contain it, and so she despises Elijah and his uncouth attempts to win and possess her. She has given her love rather to Elijah's cousin and opposite, the light-hearted, blonde, dashing young sailor George De Witt,⁵ with whom she associates freedom.

An indication of Mehalah's free nature is her signature red cap, the *bonnet rouge* or Phrygian cap, associated by the Romans with the freed slave and later taken up by French revolutionaries as a symbol of the possession and pursuit of freedom. Mehalah's symbolic cap connects her to the French Revolution which, at the time of the story, had only recently begun across the Channel. Before the events of the story, George "had given her in jest a picture of the Goddess of Liberty as proclaimed in

⁵ Some surnames used in the novel, like Mussett and DeWitt (or D'Witt) are still found on the island in fairly large numbers today.

Paris, wearing the *bonnet rouge*” (201), equating Mehalah with the very embodiment of liberty.

Despite Mehalah’s strong association with freedom, she is not merely a symbol of freedom, a term in an opposition, or a piece of the setting. Rather, she is more equivalent to the ambivalent setting in its entirety; the first words of *Mehalah* establish an ambivalence of setting, and we soon find an echoing ambivalence in the character of Mehalah. The novel treats names with much attention and significance, and Mehalah is called by two names; one corresponding to the land, the other to the water. Her “land” name, Mehalah (“A regular Essex marshland name” [102]), is a feminine variation of the name *Mahalah* briefly mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:18,⁶ which means tenderness, barrenness, or sickness.⁷ Likewise, the inland home of the torpid Saxons is associated in the novel with sickness:

In the plaster and oak cottages away from the sea, by stagnant pools, the hatching places of clouds of mosquitoes, whence rises with the night the haunting spirit of tertian ague, the hag that rides on, and takes the life out of the sturdiest men and women, and shakes and wastes the vital nerves of the children. (20)

Mehalah’s nickname, Glory, is what the “sailor and fisher fellows like to call her” (230); it derives from the ship-name “Gloriana” (a name given to Elizabeth I), which is embroidered on her Guernsey sweater. Like the sweater, the name Glory is a second-hand acquirement, nonetheless fitting because of Mehalah’s queen-like strength and beauty. The word “glory” also has Old Testament connotations, being used in several biblical translations to translate a wide range of Old Testament

⁶ “And his sister Hammoleketh bare Ishod, and Abiezer, and Mahalah.”

⁷ The narrator of Mehalah notes that, because of the Huguenot influence, many in the area have a “Calvinistic partiality for Old Testament names” (20).

Hebrew words which had a general meaning of brightness, splendor, triumph, and majesty, and “glory” is used to describe the visible aura of God and heaven.⁸

Mehalah’s grandmother, who was a gypsy, married her Saxon grandfather. Mehalah inherited her grandmother’s darker, gypsy appearance, associated in the novel with water and freedom, but the reader is continually reminded of Mehalah’s equal Saxon heritage by her restraining relationship with her pale, sickly Saxon mother, who falls decidedly with the land people (as indicated by her name “Sharland”⁹). Mehalah’s mother, Mrs. Sharland, suffers from the ague, described as a land-sickness, which makes her ill with a cold sweat, as if she expels the water which tortures and sickens her. In fact, Mrs. Sharland is unable to abide any contact with water, and when stepping from a boat on those rare occasions that she leaves home, Mrs. Sharland requires a stool for stepping dry-footed to land. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Sharland, with her illness, weakness against water, weakness of character, and alcoholism, acts as a physical and emotional impediment which limits Mehalah’s choices and freedom.

In the contrast between Elijah and Mehalah, Elijah is on the side of restriction. While the Sharlands do not own land, Elijah is strongly associated with his family

⁸ This glory of God can also be understood as a contradiction-based threshold image defined by subjective perspective: in a later discussion the narrator mentions the biblical passage which describes God’s “glory” as a burning light to the Israelites on one side and a dark cloud to the Egyptians on the other, as the narrator of *Mehalah* mentions: “A woman can be heroically self-sacrificing and behave with magnificent generosity towards man, but not towards one of her own sex. She is like the pillar that accompanied the Israelites and confounded the Egyptians; she is cloud and darkness to these, but light and fire to those” (96).

⁹ The surname Sharland was actually more common in Baring-Gould’s Devon than Essex. The name refers to some sort of land, and possibly comes from “shire-land” or “fair-land” (the Old English *scir* meaning bright or fair). It could also be derived from “shore-land,” perhaps even referring, as relevant to *Mehalah*, to reclaimed farmland.

land, which goes back many generations. Elijah proudly states that his Rebow family motto is “*When I take hold, I hold fast.*” Holding fast, he proclaims, is

a family characteristic. It is a family pleasure. We take a pride in it. I don’t care what it is, whether it is a bit of land, or a piece of coin, or a girl, it is all the same, and I think you’ll find it is so with me. (38)

Elijah’s restricting power is metonymically focused in his “great hands” (10). For example, when his assertion of ownership over Mehalah is spurned, he lays his “heavy palm” on her shoulder and declares to her, in a mixture of biblical phrases, “Give me your hand, and mine is light; I will help you. Let me lay it on you and it will crush you. Escape it you cannot. This way or that. My hand will clasp or crush” (6).¹⁰

All of Elijah’s pronouncements have at least a slightly religious tone, those concerning Mehalah in particular. The Rebow family has Huguenot and Calvinist ancestry. Elijah has fitted materials from his Calvinistic upbringing into his own zealously held philosophy dominated by fate. He believes that he and Mehalah share a spiritual bond and are fated for one another. He relishes the challenge of bringing

¹⁰ Elijah’s statement is a combination of Jesus’ words from the Gospels:

Matthew 11:29-30 (KJV):

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 21:42-44 (KJV) (an account also found in Luke 20:17-18):

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

This passage references Psalm 118:22-23 and a concept found in Isaiah 28:16. (Other examples of the motif of God as a mighty foundational or demolishing rock can be found in 2 Samuel 22: 2-4, Daniel 2:44-45, Zechariah 12:1-3, Isaiah 26:4-5, Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 44:7-8, Psalm 61:2-3, etc.)

her free heart under his control. Elijah's unrelenting desire to possess Glory (he refuses to use her given name) is the novel's main source of conflict; he secretly and doggedly manipulates events to curtail her freedom by limiting her options and thereby drawing her to himself. To this end he is an outright villain: he steals Mehalah's rent money; shoots at George De Witt from cover of darkness; arranges for George to be pressed into military service; burns down her home; and so on.

As his name suggests, Elijah is a "prophet" who states his beliefs with the absolute assurance of prophecy. His prophetic statements are necessarily opposed to the cherished freedom of Mehalah

Elijah is, however, like Mehalah, more than a mere term in an opposition—more than simply a stock villain. Like her, he also mediates a "threshold" existence, being an incongruous mixture of the noble and bestial: "His nose was aquiline, and would have given a certain nobility to his countenance, had not his huge jaws and heavy chin contributed an animal cast to his face" (*Mehalah* 2). Though he does begin the story as a stock character, he is gradually revealed to be much more complex. He is a villain who becomes a sort of hero—yet remains a paradoxical mixture of villain and hero to the very end.

As I have mentioned, in *Origin* Baring-Gould states that human consciousness cannot exist within absolutes like freedom or absolute restriction (*Origin*, Vol. II, 29). The human consciousness is able to mediate contradictions by way of what Baring-Gould labels the *indefinite*.

If we look about for a simple and indecomposable idea which may harmonize these complex terms [reason and sentiment], and serve as the proportional mean between them, we shall find it in the idea of the indefinite, or that which is incessantly defining itself, without being ever completely successful, and which has therefore two faces, one intelligible to reason, the other accessible to the sentiment by faith. (*Origin*, Part II, 24).

The indefinite is the dual-faced, threshold consciousness of man which is “incessantly defining itself” between opposites like reason and sentiment. Baring-Gould states that a person can choose to specialize one “face” over its opposite or work towards somehow conciliating them.

Mehalah Sharland’s two “faces” mediate the chief “complex terms” of the novel, freedom and restriction. These dual faces are found in her dual names and ancestries. Her water-name Glory is a “spiritual” name pointing towards freedom; her given name Mehalah is of the restricted land. Elijah is literally “dual-faced,” with his noble upper face—featuring intelligent eyes and an aquiline nose—and his lower face with its huge, “animal” jaw. Interestingly, with Elijah, restriction is presented as the more elevated side of his dual nature; his intelligent upper face suggests control in contrast with his lower, animal face, which suggests wildness. This arrangement seems to draw inspiration from the werewolf idea (which Baring-Gould, after writing *The Book of Were-wolves* [1865],¹¹ had considered thoroughly). The werewolf concept is further related to the strongly medieval concept of amphibious man, existing somewhere between angel and beast, and partaking of the natures of both.

With Mehalah it is the opposite; freedom for her is elevated above restriction, which is associated with her weak mother and the general torpidity and restriction caused by the ague.

In terms of *Origin*, both individuals are axial, sharing the same contradiction, and yet each specializes an opposite side of this contradiction.

¹¹ *The Book of Were-Wolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition*, London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1865.

Similar to the opening of *Origin*, *Mehalah* exhibits a sequence of more and more complex forms, beginning with the dialectical setting, developing into the marshland populace, and culminating in the battle between Mehalah and Elijah. As in *Origin*, each form retains the dialectic and material of earlier forms, including the “spiritual” form of Elijah and Mehalah. Mehalah and Elijah mediate within themselves the oppositional setting of land and sea. Their threshold selves suggest them as “indefinite” characters, “incessantly” defining themselves within the opposite terms of their setting. Furthermore, they define themselves in the presence of an opposed threshold self.

While still believing in an ultimately inescapable fate, Elijah, in his elitist attitude, states that he and Mehalah are the only ones of their locale, the marshland region, who are “real people” with free-will:

I tell you what, Mehalah. God made most folks of clockwork and stuck them on their little plots of soil to spin round and run their courses, like the figures on an Italian barrel-organ. You look at Mersea Island, that is the board of such a contrivance [...] But as He was making the dolls that were to twirl and pirouette His breath got into some, and they are different from the rest. They don't go according to the clockwork, and don't follow the circles of the machine, as set agoing by the organ-handle. God himself can't count on them, for they have free wills, and His breath is genius and independence in their hearts. They go where they list, and do what they will, they follow the impulse of the breath of God within, and not the wires that fasten them to the social mechanism. I do not know what I may do. I do not know what you may do. We have the breath of God in us. (281)

Unlike the clockwork dolls of Mersea Island who follow the simple “land” and “sea” positions, Elijah and Mehalah control themselves in a self-determination that takes place on the “board” of Mersea Island, within the dialectic of freedom and restriction, the space for subjective existence. Elijah does not know what either of them may do because they do not follow a set “course.” They work within two “courses.” They have a space for movement within the double-ness of their nature.

St George

I have presented Mehalah as a threshold character, and now I would like to consider how this threshold nature plays out in her attempts at self-development. In the philosophy of *Origin*, the progress of true conciliation is always a movement from the finite to the infinite. Baring-Gould's reasoning behind this seemingly arbitrary condition is that man is finite from the beginning (containing within himself all previous steps of development, which includes the most basic finite, material elements), but man neither is nor ever can be infinite—he is only always infinite potentially. The act of continued, expansive becoming must then be a propulsion from the primal finite towards the infinite—yet without ever disregarding the finite as the solid restriction from which one continually “pushes off” into the infinite; the finite remains a necessary component because the indefinite act of becoming requires a maintenance of the threshold self between opposites. By doing this one is able to proceed within the limitedness of the finite towards the freedom of the infinite. Baring-Gould states that the mystic who disregards the finite material and the materialist who disregards the infinite spiritual are both trapped in a false unity of their own specialization, and are thus unable to evolve.

Mehalah is not satisfied with her life on the Ray with her mother. Though she has a relatively large degree of freedom within her sphere, she craves more:

Her mind hungered for something more than the little space of the Ray could supply. Her soul had wings and sought to spread them and soar away, whither, however, she did not know. She had a dim prevision of something better than the sordid round of common cares which made up the life she knew. (75-76)

Mehalah's desire for development of her freedom is deep-felt yet vague in its goal.

The narration throughout depicts her desire as an unrefined, motiveless, paradoxically structured straining towards the infinite:

There was something, which yet was no *thing*, to which her weary soul stretched, in dim unconsciousness. There was a communing without words, even without the thoughts which form into words, with that Unseen which is yet so surely felt. It was the spirit—that infinite essence so mysteriously enclosed within bounds, in strange contradiction to its nature, asserting its nature and yearning for Infinity. (96)

Rare passages like this are brief glimpses of some kind of philosophy undergirding the novel. Mehalah's desire for an expanded freedom is a desire for personal progress towards not just freedom, but transcendence—though Mehalah is not able to explain it as such. Here we witness her internal contradiction as her “infinite” free self strains against her “enclosed” limited self. Though Mehalah does not understand her desire, she believes that she will find answers in her marriage with George.

Baring-Gould discusses in *Origin* what he sees as an analogy between sexual longing and spiritual longing: “The religious passion, the straining of the desire towards God, is a fact—as certain a fact as the sexual passion, the straining of the desire of man towards woman, to which, indeed, it bears resemblance” (Part I, 395). In *Mehalah*, sexuality and spirituality are always linked. Elijah's expressions of craving for Mehalah certainly have a religious tone. Mehalah's spiritual longing is pragmatically joined with her desire for love; she hopes that George, to whom she is secretly betrothed, will unlock the mystery of marriage—a spiritual union which will lead her to a transcendence of greater freedom:

The thought of life with him filled her with exultation. She could leap up, like the whooper swan, spread her silver wings, and shout her song of rapture and of defiance, like a trumpet. He would open to her the gates into that mysterious world into which she now only peeped, he would solve for her the perplexities of her troubled soul, he would lead her to the light which would illumine her eager mind. (76)

Mehalah believes that marriage with George will somehow illumine the way into a “mysterious world” of expansive freedom. It is soon made clear to the reader that Mehalah has made George into far more than he deserves.

Throughout her exceptionally isolated life on the Ray, Mehalah has had only the prolonged company of her “land-minded” mother. Though she has known George for many years, “she had not seen enough of him to know him as he really was, she therefore loved him as she idealised him” (76). Having limited means of personal development, Mehalah seized upon her brief encounters with George and, in a religious act, built him into the “image of her worship”:

To her, George De Witt was the ideal of all that was true and manly. She was noble herself, and her ideal was the perfection of nobility. She was rude indeed, and the image of her worship was rough hewn, but still with the outline and carriage of a hero. She could not, she would not, suppose that George De Witt was less great than her fancy pictured. (76)

This description, particularly the idea of a “rough hewn” ideal, brings to mind the chapter in *Origin* on idolatry (Part I, Chap. 9). Here Baring-Gould argues that all religious development has some element related to idolatry, which is in essence the projection of natural and anthropomorphic ideals in an attempt to conceptualize God. He describes idol-making as a helpful religious tool: “The principle use of images to a savage is to give definite personality to a vague idea, such as could hardly be grasped without material aid” (Part I, 181). He says that even the more “advanced” religious forms create an abstract image of God through the projection of ideals.

Being only faintly known by Mehalah, but having the outward appearance of a hero, George was a blank canvas for her to project her own ideal self. The ideal George, created by Mehalah’s assumption of what he *should* be, is a projection of her ideals. In this way Mehalah has made George into an external projection of a side of

her dual-faced nature, a “material aid” for conceptualizing the “infinite” part of herself which she cannot understand. Mehalah’s relationship with George creates for her a somewhat comprehensible threshold self, and marriage with her idol George, she feels, will bring the contradictory elements of this self into wedded unity, marrying her present restricted reality with her ideal of transcendent freedom.

In his chapter on idolatry, Baring-Gould states that religious development takes on different forms—another form related to idolatry he calls a spiritual *fetish*, a place considered to be a concentration of spiritual power. Later in the novel, after losing George, Mehalah is forced to use other external materials on which to focus her desire for freedom and the infinite. These spiritual fetishes are distant, sublime things, such as a star, and, most notably, the seaward horizon.

Baring-Gould allows a rare moment of disclosure in *Origin* to recount an incident of his own childhood version of Mehalah’s “yearning for Infinity”:

I well remember, as a boy, being overcome by a sudden glimpse up the Val d’Azun in the Pyrenees. A soft haze which had obscured the mountains rose and dissolved into floss silver in the sky, and through it the sun poured a subdued glory over the snows of the Pic de Gabizos. The scene was more beautiful than I could bear, and I burst into sobs. (Part II, 345)

He describes the ache brought on by the sublime sight as a “pleasing pain,” which “awakens a desire for something beyond the flat horizon of the everyday life we are doomed to live,” a sentiment echoed in Mehalah’s longing. As with Mehalah, he explains this pain as a straining of the internal contradiction of the infinite and the finite. The infinite strains against the finite in order to appreciate more the sublime experience. The sublime draws the admirer’s nature towards the infinite it suggests.

Elsewhere in *Origin*, Baring-Gould contemplates how differing landscapes of sublimity might shape religious development:

The Shemite remains on his sandy plains gazing into the cloudless sky, lost in the sense of the majesty of infinity, and slowing excogitating the idea of a sole God. [...] But the Aryan grows up among mountain pastures, when he watches. [...] Heaven is not so far above him. The clouds spread and flash fire below his feet. (Part I, 142)

Baring-Gould considered the Mersea marshland to contain its own particular incitement towards spiritual development as well. When he was settling into the role of parson at East Mersea, a pitiable woman who lived by the church opened her heart to him and expressed her severe dissatisfaction with her flat and plodding marshland home. She told her new parson that she longed to see the Alps. His biographer Purcell tells us that he “pointed to the sky, with its usual tremendous cloud effects. There were Alps enough there, he told her” (101). Baring-Gould felt that, in some compensation for the monotony of the flat marshes, the amazingly open sky of Mersea provided a window of sublimity for the world-weary soul.

Of course Baring-Gould had seen the *actual* Alps, on several occasions, so it is tempting to dismiss this response as all too pat and patronizing. Nonetheless, we can safely assume that the Baring-Gould, who was a pioneer in the appreciation of humble English folk culture, did genuinely perceive sublimity in the Essex marshland. Though he never really warmed to the place or the people (nor they to him), he did, after all, stage a grand Gothic novel, exploring the essence of being, in that very marshland.

Mehalah is “full of dim gropings after something higher, vaster, than the flat, narrow life” she leads (*Mehalah* 173). After losing George, she directs her spiritual longing to the extremes of this dialectical marshland setting. The “unbounded horizon” (*Mehalah* 210) of the open sea eventually becomes for her a sublime vision, the focus of her “straining for the infinite” (*Mehalah* 209). Throughout the novel

appear various threshold arrangements of land and sea, and these contain for Mehalah mysterious messages about her self-development.

Aboard the *Pandora*

Elijah and George are cousins, linked as family so that each may be the better contrasted; Mehalah tells George, “I can trace little resemblance in your features, but something in your voice” (32). They are positioned in relation to Mehalah as absolutes, with George leading to liberation and Elijah to restriction. Mehalah desires to marry George, and Elijah desires to marry Mehalah. The contradiction of these two desires, with their spiritual undertones, provides the novel’s distinctive tension.

Each of these three have a home which is, as a variation on the opening setting, some type of threshold of land and water. Mehalah lives on her island above the overflowing marsh. Elijah rules at Red Hall, a tall, lonely manor surrounded by reclaimed saltings within a sea-wall. And George lives with his mother on the *Pandora*, an old collier¹² that his father drove on the hard (a solid beach) and “dismasted.” The grounded ship at times sits on dry land, at times is surrounded by the tide.

Though Elijah dismisses George along with the rest of Mersea, calling him a “clown without a soul” (284), George is presented as having a sort of threshold self. George’s mother, who is Elijah’s aunt, calls him “a glass of half and half, rum and water,” because he has the blood of her fiery, wealthy Rebow clan watered down with the blood of his father, a “low chap” (217).

¹² A cargo ship for carrying coal.

Early in the novel, George stands on the deck of the *Pandora* with Mehalah and young Phoebe, the scheming, petty, golden-haired village belle. In this scene, George is shown as on a threshold, placed in a position to choose. George and Mehalah are known as a couple, but the unscrupulous Phoebe is eager to steal him away. George is positioned (like Mehalah) as if at a threshold between two very different choices:

The two girls stood side by side. The contrast between them was striking, and the young man noticed it. Mehalah was tall, lithe, and firm as a young pine, erect in her bearing, with every muscle well developed [...] Her navy-blue jersey and skirt, the scarlet of her cap and kerchief, and of a petticoat that appeared below the skirt, made her a rich combination of colour, suitable to a sunny clime rather than to the misty bleak east coast. Phoebe was colourless beside her, a faded picture, faint in outline. Her complexion was delicate as the rose, her frame slender, her contour undulating and weak. She was the pattern of a trim English village maiden, with the beauty of youth, and the sweetness of ripening womanhood, *sans* sense, *sans* passion, *sans* character, *sans* everything—pretty vacuity. (64-65)

These fundamentally different types are set in a balance with George at the center as judge of their relative worth.

Phoebe certainly understands the evening as a contest, and after a series of passively combative statements, bluntly asks George to choose between the two: “Black or gold, which do you most admire, George?” (65). George does not like the directness of the question. The choice is made simple for the reader—Mehalah possesses the substantive beauty—but George is deeply indecisive and weak in judgment.

The contest between the women seems to be in Mehalah’s favor until this point when George is pressed to an actual choice. He is reluctant to reveal his engagement to Mehalah, partially because in his weakness he kissed Phoebe earlier that day and does not want to be exposed. In response to George’s silence and Phoebe’s teasing, Mehalah grows angry and casts Phoebe from the boat into the water

below, agitating George. Mehalah storms away, leaving George in his typically unresolved state:

George was placed in a difficult situation. The girl to whom he was betrothed was angry, and had declared her determination not to tread the planks of the *Pandora* again, and the girl who had made advances to him, and whom his mother would have favoured, had been ejected unceremoniously from it, and perhaps injured, at all events irretrievably offended. (70)

In strong contrast with Elijah's passionate, unshakable determination is George's characteristic indecisiveness. The narrator blames this weakness on George's mother, who, like her nephew Elijah, and the Rebows in general, relishes ruling over others: "George's indecision of character was due in measure to his bringing up by such a [strong-willed] mother. He had been cuffed and yelled at from infancy. [...] Self-assertion had been beat or bawled out of him" (61). Because of his mother's excessive control over him, George has no ability to control himself.

Perhaps the connection between Mehalah's association of George with freedom and his actual lack of ability to choose is that George is unable to *restrict* himself in the self-limiting act of making a choice. Therefore, to use terms elaborated in *Origin*, George would be a self-defeating threshold-self unable to make a threshold choice—absolutely restricted in a state of absolute and thus absolutely limiting freedom. The freedom Mehalah idealizes in George would seem to actually impair him from making decisions; he is so "free" that he lacks the resolve required for exercising freedom.

Nonetheless, indecisive George, frozen at the moment of choosing, is a portrait of choosing on a threshold. Furthermore, this portrait of a simple choice suggests the possibility of choosing incorrectly. The error is obviously found in choosing Phoebe, who represents in her person that which Baring-Gould describes in

Origin as the one true evil: “[N]egation in its concrete form is evil, impiety, hatred of God, horror of men. It is what the Christian calls Satan, the personification and principle of division” (Part II, 181). Phoebe is a deceptive angel of light, a personification of negation, “sans sense, sans passion, sans character, sans everything—pretty vacuity.” She is introduced in a chapter called “The Decoy,” and her conversation with George about decoy ducks makes it clear to the reader that she is a “false” person who tempts George to his peril. Though she has the appearance of a “real” person—a threshold person—she is not; she is empty because she has specialized the physical and finite and negated anything deeper like the spiritual (that which compels Mehalah). Thus to choose Phoebe would be to choose negation. The *Pandora* contest brings to mind Pandora’s Box—and both involve a choice that might introduce evil into the world.¹³

The temptation found in George to choose negation is the temptation to negate one opposition for another, thus dismantling one’s indefinite self, and thus halting progress: “Evil is the rejection of the infinite for the finite, the declension from one pole to the other, and perversion of the moral sense. When the infinite is lost sight of, the sentiment of the indefinite loses its character” (*Origin*, Part II, 38). According to Baring-Gould, negation eventually leads to a “declension” because any negation necessarily subtracts from the whole of the infinite.

In George’s situation, Mehalah and Phoebe form a threshold not between two opposed truths, but rather between conciliation and negation: Mehalah is a complex and contradictory threshold being with potential for change and growth while Phoebe

¹³ “The vicar was wont to remark that it [the ship *Pandora*] was a ‘Pandora’s’ box full of all gusts but minus gentle Zephyr” (*Mehalah* 62).

lacks any such complexity: “If Phoebe’s hair resembled a spring fleecy cloud gilded by the sun, buoyant in the soft warm air, that of Mehalah was like an angry thunder shower with a promise of sunshine gleaming through the rain (65).

Taking place the night of the *Pandora* contest, George’s supposed death and subsequent supposed ghostly appearance before Mehalah is the first undeniably Gothic event in the story. An obscure figure, who Mehalah believes to be the ghost of George, shatters the window of Mehalah’s home and casts through it the medallion she had given him.

The contest between the two suitors, or the ideas of freedom and restriction they represent to her, is a constant struggle within and around Mehalah even after George’s “death”—or, it should be said, *especially* after, since this traumatic occurrence forces her to reconsider her freedom by way of the marshland dialectic—without her hero to aid her, and in the context of her antagonistic relationship with Elijah, her ideal’s opposite.

The ghostly shattering of Mehalah’s window seemingly opens a threshold between the world of the dead and the world of the living, and yet this act reveals how completely cut off from George Mehalah now is. Beginning with George’s supposed ghostly manifestation, Mehalah experiences other Gothic scenarios which relate vaguely yet consistently to her quest for freedom and the possibility of being trapped in restriction.

The Grimshoe Predicament

On a night some time after George's "death," Elijah tells Mehalah a local legend concerning Grimshoe (sometimes written Grim's Hoe), an earth mound on Mersea Island across from the Ray. According to the legend, Grimshoe is reputed to cover an ancient Viking ship-burial, and within the hull of the ship are entombed twin warrior brothers. Elijah states that these brothers "loved one another; they were twins, born the same hour, and they had but one heart and soul; what one willed that willed the other, what one desired that the other desired also" (146). This shared will became paradoxically conflicted when both brothers fell in love with the same woman. They fought and killed each other to have her, and were then buried with their armor and swords in their ship. The maiden was buried alive between their corpses.

Ever since the burial, these twin brothers are slowly resurrected throughout the moon's cycle, so that at each full moon their reconstituted corpses battle again for the woman who lives on and watches in horror. The three live in this tortured existence until one brother can kill the other and claim the woman, though the fight can never end because the twins are completely equal in every way.¹⁴

¹⁴ The "Grim" of Grimshoe comes from the Old-English word meaning "fierce," "cruel," and also "a haunted place." "Grim" was used by Anglo-Saxons to describe places, often of prehistoric constructions, that seemed, awe-inspiring, strange, or foreboding. "Hoe" means "hill."

A Hundred in Norfolk is named "Grimshoe." A prehistoric earthwork in Leeds was named "Grim's Ditch" by the Anglo-Saxons.

What is described in the novel as "Grimshoe" is known today as the West Mersea Barrow, a Romano-British mound of the first century. I have not found any evidence that the barrow was ever called Grimshoe. Apparently, the story of the Danish brothers was introduced by Baring-Gould, and was not an actual local legend concerning the barrow.

When Baring-Gould wrote the novel, the insides of the barrow were a mystery, though it was rumored in legend to be a ship-burial. In 1912 the barrow was excavated; inside was found a welded lead case containing a green glass jar holding cremated remains. This item is currently held in the Castle Museum Colchester.

When Mehalah asks Elijah why he has told her this story, he answers that the story relates to the two of them. He says that they, like the ghostly twins, are fated to love and hate throughout their own vicious struggle. Mehalah tells Elijah that she feels no love and only abhorrence for him, yet inwardly she cannot deny that she senses a mysterious and fated connection:

That he was drawn towards her by some attractive power exercised against her will, she knew full well, but she would not allow that he exercised the least attraction on her. Yet she did feel that there was some sort of spell upon her. Hate him as she did and would, she knew that she could not altogether escape him, she had an instinctive consciousness that she was held by him, she did not understand how, in his hands. (153)

Mehalah also senses that her connection with Elijah does relate in some way to Grimshoe, and the story he told begins to dominate her thoughts.

One night arriving home from Colchester, Mehalah discovers that her alcoholic mother has become heavily besotted. She seeks out the hidden brew, a devilish gift from the manipulative Elijah, and angrily smashes it to the floor before her mother (an act reminiscent of Moses casting down the stone tablets before the erring Israelites). The alcohol spills across the floor and some blazes in the fire. Mehalah helps her dazed mother to bed, with hatred in her heart for Elijah, who had made “her own mother despicable in her eyes” (151).

Then, instead of her usual custom of meditating on her departed George, Mehalah sits before the hearth and thinks on Elijah and his mysterious tale. The potent fumes of the spirits spur the imaginative intensity of her increasingly desperate thoughts.

Then she thought of the story of Grim’s Hoe, of the two who loved and hated, embraced and fought eternally therein, those two destined from their mother’s womb to be together in life

and death, with twin souls and bodies, who had they lived in love might have rested in death, but as they fought must fight on. There they were, in the old hollow womb of the ship down in the earth in darkness, loving one another as brothers, fighting each other as rivals; the conflict lasting till one shall master the other, a thing that never can be, for both were born with equal strength, and equal purpose, and equal stubbornness of will. (153-154)

Mehalah is intensely affected by Elijah's story, particularly his compelling suggestion that Grimshoe *means* something for *her*. She perceives a layered relationship between the Grimshoe fight, her struggle with Elijah, and her striving for personal freedom and development.

Her heart beat. She felt as if she were in the ship hold watching the eternal conflict, and as if she must take a part with one or the other; as if her so doing would determine the victory. But which should she will to conquer, when each was the counterpart of the other? She could not bear this thought, she could not endure the fumes of the spirit, it suffocated her. She sprang up. The full moon was glaring in at the window from a cloudless sky. (154)

The story causes her terror because it represents her fear of a fixed destiny where freedom and choice become meaningless. Her free nature naturally wants to disrupt such a tale; she wants to inject consequential choice into it, to find something to *do* within the story, so she springs up in the height of her obsessive meditation.

The Grimshoe conflict, an eerie legend, becomes particularly *Gothic* in Elijah's telling of its story as active in modern times and pertinent to the life of "modern" Mehalah. As the Gothic "author" Elijah establishes an ostensible Gothic threshold by connecting the ancient legend of Grimshoe with the current situation of him and Mehalah, bridging the past and present and making them relevant to each other. The continuing Grimshoe conflict suggests the resilience of the past in modernity.

Elijah's folk story is a tale framed within a tale, which establishes a setting within a setting. Grimshoe is a nightmarish confusion of the land and sea setting of Mersea: a ship buried under the earth, in which there is no sky, water, or horizon—no sign of the indefinite or the dialectic—only endless, static antagonism.

With George gone, Mehalah has lost her connection with her external projection of freedom and thus her indefinite self; she has lost the avenue through which she hoped to expand her world.

George might have introduced her into a new world of gentleness, and pity, and love. Now the door to that world was shut for ever, and she must beat her way through a world of hard realities, where every man's hand was lifted against his brother, and where was hate and resentment, and exacting of the uttermost farthing. (143)

Mehalah fears her fate will be the fruitless, endless struggling embodied by the fight between herself and Elijah. The world of "hard realities" is a fixed world of antagonism with no possibility of spiritual freedom to transcend the given. One reason she imagines herself in the Grimshoe setting is because, without George, she feels that eerie Grimshoe *is* the spiritual reality of her existence. Thus, if she is able to bring choice and freedom to Grimshoe, she might be able to do the same for her own situation. Consequently Mehalah feels compelled to break the Grimshoe cycle.

In her attempt to unlock the static dungeon of Grimshoe, Mehalah faces a contradiction which vexes her. She can see no solution other than to somehow side with one twin or the other, but "which should she will to conquer, when each [is] the counterpart of the other?" The riddle of Grimshoe which Mehalah feels compelled to solve is an impossible choice that she feels nonetheless compelled to make. Such a predicament, for a free soul like Mehalah, is unbearable. Her freedom, which she understands as her ability to choose, is made pointless.

Each setting of the novel is built from the materials of the opening setting. The setting of the *Pandora*, being a ship driven onto land, of course resonates with the opening setting, as does Grimshoe. Each taking place on strangely grounded ship, the two ship contests are a developing series, one before and one after George's supposed death.

The Grimshoe scenario is a tellingly altered version of the incident on the *Pandora*. In Grimshoe and on board the *Pandora*, we find a threshold situation involving a contest of love on a ship which demands a choice by the one for whom the fight occurs. George stands on the deciding point between "black or gold," fought over and pressed to the point of choosing; and as Mehalah sinks deeper, through her contemplation, into the "hollow womb" of Grimshoe (*Mehalah* 154), she adopts the role of the yet-living maiden who was buried on a threshold between the dead brothers. Not a passive observer like the original maiden in the story, she would change the story—she would act, if she only knew how.

George's choice, as I have stated, was between the negation of empty Phoebe and the paradoxical complexity of Mehalah. George had a simple choice between stark opposites, but he was disposed against choosing. Mehalah desires desperately to exert her freedom in the Grimshoe setting, but she is paralyzed in her choice because each side is substantive and equal and therefore neither has any reason to be preferred. Similar to George—though for a different reason—Mehalah finds herself hesitant at a threshold of (in)decision. Unlike George, Mehalah is eager to exercise her ability to choose, but then she must choose between twins, opposite only in their

purposes, and equal in all other respects. Furthermore, George's choice reveals, at least to the reader, that she should avoid the danger of negation.

The Grimshoe choice builds on the materials of the *Pandora* choice: now, instead of what was made to be an obvious choice—substance or negation—Mehalah has an impossible choice, in which to choose results in nonsensical negation of one or the other twin.

Grimshoe as Hell

Elijah's distinctive telling of the Grimshoe legend brings to mind a passage in *Origin*. Baring-Gould states that children sometimes imagine that those on the opposite side of the globe, the antipode, live in an upside-down world, a mistake caused by confusing the subjective perspective with objective truth. Baring-Gould then builds a broad metaphor from this line of thought:

When two men stand face to face, the right of one is the left of the other and *vice versâ*. [...] In the world of ideas the notions of one man are the inverse of those in another man. And in every man's own head there is a duality, which often eventuates in an antagonism. What is head upwards to the sentiment is often head downwards to the reason. Faith and logic range themselves on opposite sides. Liberty revolts against authority, and authority imposes on liberty. That which is right to the individual is wrong to the society; that which is true to reason is false to sentiment. (Part II, 41-42)

Such antagonistic opposition is fundamental in *Mehalah*, providing the setting from which all else springs. In the Grimshoe legend, the brothers are presented as antipodal twins: sharing the same heart, soul, and will, yet “upside-down” in relation to the other. Mehalah recognizes that neither Grimshoe twin is superior, and thus neither should be preferred to triumph over the other. From her imagined position in the barrow, granting her a removed, threshold perspective, she cannot specialize and

negate as she does in her own opposition to Elijah, in which “[l]iberty revolts against authority, and authority imposes on liberty.”

Strangely enough, Mehalah is placed in the Grimshoe setting both as one of the twin combatants (against Elijah) and also as an outside observer who has difficulty deciding which of the twins should be supported to win; she is both in the battle and outside it—that is, outside herself.

The *Pandora* scenario is a portrait of choosing between negation and paradoxical completeness. Negation is the source of the type of antagonism depicted in the opening conflict of setting. As a ghostly extension of this setting, Grimshoe is a picture of the subjective influence which brings antagonism to antinomy and thereby threatens its own subjectivity, which requires that antinomy to exist. Negating specialization is enacted by free-will but results in the structure of fate: subjective sensation without subjective control. In the *Origin* chapter “The Dogma of Immortality,” Baring-Gould presents such a structure as a definition of hell: a being created for infinite growth yet trapped in the finite, whose very subjectivity degrades that subjectivity and makes of it a mockery and a torture. (A free being without freedom is similar to the Pandora and Grimshoe ships in that they are ships removed from the mobilizing freedom of water).

Baring-Gould argues in the *Origin* chapter “The Basis of Authority” (Part II, Chapter 5) that God’s rule over his human creatures is “moral,” not “effective”—that is, persuasive and not forced. Thus, God does not *decide* to reward or punish a person with heaven or hell; rather, man, gifted with a creative free-will, molds his own state of existence. One’s perception determines one’s reality.

Antagonistically rejecting or neglecting one side of truth, thereby opposing the surmounting truth of conciliation, necessarily leads to hell—a state of negation and stagnation. Such a negative, self-determining influence beyond the grave is central to the Grimshoe legend and other ghost stories: the twin warriors, “had they lived in love might have rested in death, but as they fought must fight on” (*Mehalah* 154).

The upper-class Baring-Gould’s prominent complaint about the majority of the English middle and lower classes, as expressed in *Origin*, is what he saw as a general apathy towards any ennobling expansion of the self in the direction of the spiritual, the idealistic, the infinite—as made apparent in their apathy towards culture and art:

Take a Wiltshire clown and walk him through the National Gallery; he will yawn. Tell him that with a little attention and effort his mind will open to the beauties of art. He will roar in your face, fat bacon fills his soul with content, —he desires nothing further. [...] The ordinary English mind is not educated for anything noble and refined. The Anglican Church, instead of training the nobler faculties, has anathematized them and bid them be cast out as unclean. (*Origin*, Part II, 352-3)

The difficulties of *Mehalah*’s spiritual development are in part Baring-Gould’s criticism of the Anglican Church. He felt that the Church did not support spiritual development, especially in rural areas, thus leaving spiritual seekers guideless even as they respond to the dialectic “Revelation” within their own nature. He presents the Roman Catholic Church in contrast:

It is altogether different on the Continent. The Church there has held up the chin of these purer tastes in the flood which would have engulfed them. A French or an Italian peasant seldom forgets that he is one of nature’s gentlemen, for, through his Church, the sun and air have been let in on his aspirations after what is not utterly gross, and thus the animal has never been allowed to master the man. But with the Englishman of the lower classes, thanks to three hundred years of Protestantism, it is different. (*Origin*, Part II, 353)

In accordance with this conception of the English lower classes, most of the characters in *Mehalah* are stagnant boors, complacently land-locked in their finitude. Unlike Elijah and Mehalah (and, potentially, George), they have smothered any yearning for expansion beyond the given dimensions of self. (Elijah may embrace restriction, but he does so in a spiritual attitude, as I will discuss in a moment.)

In *Origin* Baring-Gould states that the self-determination of such boors is not used to develop themselves towards their eternal potential; rather, they choose to stultify their free nature until that nature is smothered:

Now to what sort of future do these gross natures look forward? If they have no sense of the intellectual, the beautiful, and the pure here, what possible satisfaction would these afford them hereafter... [...] And if the desire for anything better has burned out through neglect, there is no reason to conclude that it will be rekindled through an eternity. (*Origin*, Part II, 354)

Yet negation, not boorishness, is the fundamental sin which leads to a hell like Grimshoe, and more lofty forms of negation also exist. Baring-Gould states that Calvin, in his theological formulations, negated free-will. A sentimental spiritualist may disregard the intellectual side of spirituality, while the intellectual spiritualist is prone to disregard the emotional. Schismatic Protestants tend to negate the unity of conciliation; Roman Catholics, the individuality of division.

Relating this principle to the novel, Mehalah and Elijah negate at the spiritual or idealistic level. Unlike boorish “land” people, they are driven beyond the given in pursuit of a far distant ideal (thus they are true souls according to Elijah). Mehalah and Elijah are a more complex, “spiritual” form of the antagonistic setting and populace. They negate, from opposite vantages, subverting their own spiritual intentions.

With his Calvinist leanings, Elijah is impatient of free-will and champions restriction. While his mind may be fired with thoughts of the universal, he tends to comprehend this universal only in terms of its overwhelming unity. He is not disposed to consider human existence as significant in its present, intermediate stage, but rather from the vantage point of some infinitely projected past or future in which change is no more, all is concluded, and every part has its place in an all-encompassing unit. Elijah does not attempt to win Mehalah through anything like courting; rather he demands their union as a preordained fact.

Grimshoe and Home (and a New Home)

Mehalah will not operate from the “completed” perspective of Elijah. Quite the opposite, she is a searcher who wonders at the mysteries she experiences, including the strange ideas which Elijah presents to her (Elijah does not seem to *wonder* over anything). While Elijah holds fast to universal conclusions, Mehalah, with her characteristic freedom, is drawn to immediate experience and the pursuit of the ever-distant horizon.

Elijah and Mehalah are each motivated by a fiery, spiritually tinged passion: “her eyes, now that the sun was in them, like volcanic craters, gloomy, but full of fire [...] His face was as though cast in iron, but a living fire smouldered within and broke out through the eye-sockets as lava will lie hard and cold, a rocky crust with a fiery fluid core within that at intervals glares out at fissures” (*Mehalah* 10, 64). Elijah’s pursuit of Mehalah is driven by his conception of their fated conclusion of infinitely encompassing, universal unity; Mehalah’s escape from Elijah is driven by her vague

discernment of an expansive movement towards the infinite. Elijah is deductive, beginning from his ideal conclusions and drawing the present reality towards it, while Mehalah is inductive, working through her experience towards a mysterious, vague ideal. In this way Mehalah is like the traditional Gothic Romance heroine and Elijah the traditional Gothic villain: she works through uncertainty and frightening possibilities while he operates from an entrenched—and to her perspective, mysterious—position of authority and knowledge.

Mehalah is not content only to imagine herself at Grimshoe; she desires to observe the site empirically. Elijah had said that the subterranean warriors could be heard when battling. Springing up in perplexity from her tormented thoughts on Grimshoe, she sees the full moon shining through the window. Mehalah decides to go and test for herself the truth of what Elijah had said:

Was the story true? Could anyone hear the warriors shout and smite, who chose to listen at the full of the moon? The distance to Grim's Hoe was not over two miles. Mehalah thought she must go there and listen with her own ears. She would go. (154)

For Mehalah, the transcendently supernatural yet eternally repeated Grimshoe battle, despite its repetition, suggests an “Otherworld” outside of her experience which is nonetheless integrally connected with her own struggles with Elijah.

Intoxicated by fumes and wild thoughts of Grimshoe, Mehalah's journey to Grimshoe involves a confused mixture of the real and the fantastic. Stepping outside, she is startled by her own shadow and laughs at her nervousness. Upon reaching Grimshoe, she climbs the barrow and places her head on the earth. Listening intently for the supernatural combat, she is alerted and momentarily confused by sounds she must discern as either natural or supernatural—a fir cone falls, a stoat runs into its hole, an attacked rabbit lets out a dying scream. Mehalah lifts her head up and lays it

down again, attempting to hear beyond these physical distractions—counterfeit sounds in relation to the supernatural she strains to hear. A culminating clash of the real and the fantastic occurs as her ear is pressed to Grimshoe: straining for sounds of subterranean battle, her eye catches the illumination of fire in the distance. She starts up in terror as she realizes that her own home, with her mother locked inside, burns in the distance. That Mehalah should be listening for proof of Grimshoe when she discovers her home ablaze is a quite suggestive interweaving of investigation and discovery.

Because of the recent, unprecedented theft of some of her sheep, Mehalah had only earlier that night, for the first time, installed a lock in the door of her home as protection against criminals. (Elijah is of course responsible for the theft, in another attempt to impoverish Mehalah and drive her to him.)

As Mehalah races home, self-recrimination whirls through her mind: “O God! what had she done? Why had she gone? Had not the spilled spirits caught fire and set the house in flames? Why had she locked her mother in? a thing never done before” (156). Indeed, why *had* she gone? She went to explore the Grimshoe mystery (the paradox that she is compelled to make a meaningless choice), and that exploration has led to a single, terrifying paradox applicable both to the “real” world and that of Grimshoe—the two worlds juxtaposed in Mehalah’s listening to the ground and seeing the flame. In that moment the otherworldly terror of Grimshoe is channeled into the immediate terror of her familiar home burning, “the dead Danish warriors forgotten in the agony of her fear” (156). The burning home—on another “mound” of earth across from Grimshoe—is presented as an “answer” to her

supernatural investigation because of the sudden reversal to the “real” at the climatic point of that investigation.

This paradox, applicable to Grimshoe and her home, is that of the dual-faced, threshold perspective. The locked door is a literal threshold which is presented as paradoxical—a common item in Gothic fiction (e.g., the alternately protecting and entrapping the heroine’s bedroom door in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*). Mehalah locked the front door to keep out criminals, but ends up locking her sleeping mother inside the burning house. The restriction of thieves becomes the restriction of her mother; the thieves’ freedom to enter would also be her mother’s freedom to exit. A door, as a passage and barrier, is a threshold of both freedom and restriction for her and her enemies; protection becomes endangerment, while exposure would allow escape. Furthermore Mehalah had cast down the alcohol in order to save her mother, and now she believes that this act has started the fire that now threatens to kill her.

Grimshoe likewise contains an antinomy within a central truth which is both divided and united by the threshold perspective. In Grimshoe, Mehalah imagines herself on a threshold, while on each side a twin brother fights the other, identical to his twin except for perspective. The antipodal twins of Grimshoe are “one,” opposed in their shared will. At the moment of “revelation” on Grimshoe, Mehalah develops a dual perspective which splits her abstractly on either side of a literal threshold: her earlier protective intentions with the lock and her later agony over her use of it positions her as a single being both outside and inside the house—at a threshold between the two, uniting them into a single paradoxical truth concerning the lock. At

this point Mehalah races to fight against her earlier action of locking the door, as if in battle with herself (“Why had she locked her mother in?”). At this point of revelation she experiences herself as a singular being turned in against herself. Thus Mehalah’s investigation of Grimshoe leads to a seemingly unrelated discovery which is nonetheless connected.

To Mehalah’s mediating perspective, a single truth can be simultaneously one thing and its opposite, a duality contained within a single thing. Such a perspective is highlighted on the Gothic threshold, which inspires a paradoxical and uneasy tension as opposites both starkly separate and strangely coincide. Elijah’s argument is that Mehalah relates to the Grimshoe conflict because she also has a “double” in him and that they are truly “one” even in their intense opposition.

Mehalah reaches her home only to discover that Elijah has saved her mother. (Elijah is certainly a “paradoxical” hero-villain; he saves Mehalah’s mother and earns Mehalah’s grudging thanks, but he also set the house on fire.) With her mother in ill health and with no other options, a bewildered Mehalah is forced to accept the invitation of Elijah to board at Red Hall. Upon arriving there, Elijah celebrates the triumph of his prophecy: “‘Welcome, Glory! welcome to Red Hall! The New Year sees you under the roof where you shall rule as mistress; your destiny is mightier than your will’” (158).

Mehalah spends the second half of the novel under the now more manifest control of Elijah. The relocation to Red Hall is a great victory for Elijah as both the reward of his nefarious labors and as proof of the destiny he believes in: “I told her she must come, sooner or later. Sooner or later the same roof must cover both. She

would fight me, and would not come to me, but her destiny is stronger than her will.

My will is the destiny of her life.” (160). For Mehalah, the move is a crippling defeat.

She could not speak. She was stunned. A belt of iron bound her heart and restrained its free bounds, a weight of lead crushed her brain and killed its independence of action. She, who had been hitherto a law to herself, whose will had been unfettered, now discovered herself a captive under the thralldom of a will mightier, or more ungovernable, than her own. (160)

Mehalah’s home at the Ray has been taken from her and the Grimshoe mystery must be worked out at the threshold of Elijah’s Red Hall, “half in and half out the sea” (32). In this threshold space she must continue to puzzle over the Grimshoe paradox and its personal manifestation in her seemingly unavoidable battle against her “double” Elijah. On the new arena of Elijah’s home, the battle between the two becomes a daily “Grimshoe” struggle, and, under the unbearable patronage of Elijah, Mehalah’s longing for freedom becomes more intense.

Red Hall and the Mad Brother

Red Hall—a tower-like, moated, red-brick structure—dominates in striking isolation over a remarkably level field lined with drainage canals and surrounded by a sea-wall. The sea-wall was built to hold back the “incessant incursions” of water described in the book’s introduction (presumably by Elijah’s Huguenot ancestors). Furthermore, excess water is collected in the canals and ejected by the windmill pump into the sea. The estate is a reclaimed salting—that is, “contested” marshland transformed into stable, profitable farmland. Red Hall is, appropriately, a triumph of restriction of land over the freedom of water.

Red Hall is eerie and castle-like, a decidedly Gothic stronghold, marked above the entrance with “1636” and over the fireplace with the family motto, “WHEN I HOLD (1636) I HOLD FAST” (37). This pairing of the motto and ancient date depicts the claustrophobic restrictiveness of the past in Gothic fiction. The restrictiveness of the Gothic involves the fixity of the past which cannot be undone, the indelible sins of the father being visited upon descendants as a sort of predetermined fate.

The final flourish of Gothic detail is Elijah’s mad older brother, who is locked in a dungeon on the ground floor. The Gothic atmosphere, relentless owner, and madman living below make Red Hall a strange new home for Mehalah.

Elijah explains his mad brother to Mehalah in his typically brusque manner: “Been mad from a child. A good job for me, as he was the elder. Now I have him in keeping, and the land and the house and the money are mine. What I hold, I hold fast. Amen” (44). Baring-Gould certainly had a personal connection to this part of his story about a mad brother and inheritance. As I have mentioned, Baring-Gould as first son was to become the squire of his family’s estate of Lew Trenchard in Devon. He had an unshakeable desire to become a parson, and, specifically, the parson of Lew Trenchard. This role, however, was meant to be taken up by his younger brother William. Baring-Gould’s struggle over inheritance with his father was settled when his brother had a mental breakdown. William never worked again, and was soon locked up because of his mad frenzies. Because of his brother’s state, Baring-Gould was allowed to inherit both roles of squire and parson—a “good job” for him, though he doubtless did not share Elijah’s exact sentiment.

The morning after Mehalah and her Mother board at Red Hall, Elijah speaks with his inflexible presumption, declaring to Abraham, the elderly worker on Mehalah's farm, that he would now work for him as master and Mehalah as mistress of the Ray and Red Hall jointly. A leering Abraham then says to Mehalah, "When are you going to church? Eh, mistress? I thought it was coming to this." Mehalah, enraged, follows after Elijah to upbraid him and assert her independence from him. In her agitated state she almost tumbles through the opened trap door. She steadies herself and becomes privy to a bizarre scene playing out below:

Faugh! an odor rose from the cellar as from the lair of a wild beast. She looked in, there was the maniac racing up and down in the den fastened by his chain, jabbering and uttering incoherent cries. He was almost naked, covered with filthy rags, and his hair hung over his face so that she could distinguish no features by the dim light that strayed down from the trap, and from the horn lantern that Elijah had placed on the steps. Rebow had a pitchfork, and he was tossing fresh straw to his brother, and raking out the sodden and crushed litter of the wretched man. (168)

What a strange tableau for Mehalah as she searches for the meaning and realization of freedom. Elijah faithfully tends to his brother (whose name is never given), allowing no help from his servants, performing the menial tasks required by himself. Nonetheless, he treats his brother savagely, often employing a cruel whip to punish him. This awkward, degrading relationship provokes a strange awe in Mehalah, particularly, I assume, because this view of Elijah contrasts with his normally assured and dominating demeanor. As in this scene, Elijah comes more clearly into focus as a complex character throughout the novel, with his own motivations and personal difficulties. We might wonder if Elijah's care for his brother, despite his cruelty, might suggest a concealed tenderness in him. Perhaps he cares for his brother alone because he cares about him and is ashamed of his condition.

Baring-Gould also toiled for his “mad” brother, in that he supported him financially. As I have said, Sabine’s father died in 1872, only a year after Sabine had become rector at East Mersea. His uncle Charles, though in old age, was still rector of the Lew Trenchard church, and so Sabine could not yet appoint himself to the living. The financial burdens for Sabine during his time at Mersea were his growing family, his invalid brother, and his uncle Charles, who, being old, needed the assistance of a curate, who Sabine apparently paid (Dickinson 61-2).

Returning to the novel, Mehalah is disarmed by the sight of the brothers, losing any desire to confront Elijah. She leaves the house and sees Elijah rake debris and waste out the ground door of his brother’s dungeon. The scene is almost tender, considering the two involved: “He did not notice her, or he pretended not to do so, and she shrank back” (168).

Mehalah and Elijah are each bound by an exasperating bond to a dependent family member. Furthermore, each dependent family member is made wretched and dependent by a prevalence of either freedom or restriction. Mehalah is essentially chained to her land-bound, petty, and sickly mother. Mehalah is unable to move beyond the borders of Mersea with her in tow. Elijah notes this when speaking to Mehalah’s mother in the opening scene at the Ray: “Why, but for you sitting there, sweating and jabbering, Glory would not be bound to this lone islet, but would go out and see the world, and taste life. She grows here like a mushroom, she does not live” (*Mehalah* 4). The mother is stationary—difficult to transport because of her sickness, and later pleased to be “imprisoned” within the confines of Red Hall.

Conversely, Elijah's brother must be diligently contained in Red Hall; he is always attempting to escape. Elijah says that he must "keep him short of food, and strap his shoulders, or he would tear the walls down in his fury" (*Mehalah* 203).

I have said that the reader is reminded of *Mehalah's* land heritage, despite her intense longing for freedom, by the constant presence of her mother. Elijah's relationship with his brother provides a similar reminder, showing that Elijah, in his own day-to-day existence, apart from *Mehalah*, fights in a personal, familial, and life-long battle between restriction and freedom. The constant incarceration of Elijah's brother is the core of Elijah's general obsession with control.

The mad brother is kept in a ground-floor cellar, built as a safeguard against flooding, while a flight of brick stairs leads to the elevated front door. Elijah accesses the dungeon through a trap-door which is located under the leather armchair on which he broods. The brother can easily be seen as an extension of Elijah's self because of Elijah's borderline insanity and later declension into madness, because the brother is never named or clearly seen, and because the brothers live in parallel sections of Red Hall. Elijah sits in his armchair over his imprisoned brother, a relatively normal living space paralleled by a madman's dungeon a flight below. Elijah's incessant pacing back and forth reminds *Mehalah* of the "mad brother pacing in the vault below" (171). This layering of Red Hall also matches Elijah's incongruous facial features, in which his refined upper face stands above his large and animalistic jaw. Red Hall is then a picture of Elijah, with his brother relating to the "free" part of his own threshold nature which he dominates and imprisons. (In this correspondence

between villain and his Gothic home we find yet another reworked trope of traditional Gothic fiction.)

Mehalah and Elijah's burdensome relations could then be considered as an external manifestation of a part of their dual nature, the despised side of the threshold (opposite to Mehalah's use of George). Yet the *person*, being family, cannot be neglected (Mehalah tells her mother, "I never, never will desert you. Whatever happens, our lot shall be cast together" [*Mehalah* 124]). Mehalah and Elijah understandably despise and fear, and thus negate, the part of their own self embodied by their dependent. Mehalah would like to escape the state represented by her mother—the "land" side of her own threshold self—to push away from limitedness of her self. She does not want to be like her mother, and she revolts against the restriction she senses in her self: her "spirit—that infinite essence so mysteriously enclosed within bounds, in strange contradiction to its nature" (96) strains against limit.

Perhaps Elijah fears losing control like his brother. Elijah understands freedom as leading to madness, which has become a burden in his life and a disgrace for his brother. He wants to restrict the wild freedom linked with his brother, and his belief in fate gives a proscribed structure and purpose to his world.

What we have then is an overlapping of characters in which the dependent is connected to the self *and* the opposite other. Elijah has reason to consider freedom to be degenerating and restriction elevating, while Mehalah believes the opposite, and they each have kin who seem to validate their contradictory inclinations. Elijah and

Mehalah are joined not only by some inscrutable destiny as suggested by Elijah, but by a familial, dissipated version of the other.

How might these overlapping characters, based on the conflict of Mehalah and Elijah, relate to Mehalah's experience of paradoxes in Grimshoe and the locked door of her burning house? In the paradoxes a single thing or act is reversed against itself. Elijah and Mehalah can be understood as Grimshoe "doubles" on the Gothic threshold. They are both presented as "threshold" characters between restriction and freedom, and their joined desires and fears as such create a "Janus-face" experience for the reader.

DeLamotte states that the Gothic world is dominated by such experiences, as encapsulated in the Gothic fear: "the fear of terrible separateness and the fear of unity with some terrible Other" (22). In *Mehalah*, a double-sided fear and desire is expressed concerning human freedom and restriction: the fear of instability is matched by a fear of restriction, while a desire for developments is matched by a desire for stability. Elijah fears losing control through freedom while Mehalah fears losing control through restriction. In this way the novel explores ideas important to the Gothic traditions ambivalence towards ancient tradition and modern innovation.

On the Threshold

As I stated earlier, Baring-Gould asserts in *Origin* a strong connection between an environment and the religious development of its people, to the point that religious development would seem to be built upon the very materials of its setting. In the isolated, independent environment of the Ray, Mehalah developed her love of

freedom. But Red Hall, with its even greater isolation and enclosing wall which blocks the outside world from view, has an atmosphere of restriction. Elijah developed his ideas here. Now Mehalah must work on the riddle of her development within the structure of Red Hall—she is still working with land and sea, just a different arrangement of them.

As declared in *Origin*, the consciousness arranges its reality based on its own dialectical functioning; the objective world is formed to be a mirror for the threshold consciousness. Two more dissimilar characters than Mehalah and Mrs. De Witt (George's mother and Elijah's sister) could hardly be imagined, yet Mrs. De Witt, growing up at Red Hall, desired freedom as Mehalah now does:

Red Hall was, after all, her [Mrs. De Witt's] home; its marshes were the first landscape on which her eyes had opened, its daisies had been her first necklaces, its bulrushes her first whips, its sea-wall the boundary of her childish world. It was a yearning for a wider, less level world, which had driven her in a rash moment into the arms of Moses De Witt. (86)

Mehalah, like Mrs. De Witt, sought to fulfill her yearning for freedom in marriage. The picture of a young Miss Rebow chasing after expansion contrasts with her older, silly, self-satisfied state, and this difference suggests the possibility of Mehalah's path towards freedom ending in stagnant failure—someone with grand aspirations can nonetheless go wrong. Like Miss Rebow, Mehalah continues at Red Hall her yearning for a wider world.

Standing at Red Hall's front door atop the staircase, one can view the sea and surrounding countryside. On the field, however, surrounded by the obstructive sea-wall, nothing can be seen save the world of Red Hall. In this way Red Hall is buried like Grimshoe, cut off from the expansiveness as symbolically invested by Mehalah in the sea horizon. In a deflated mood after witnessing Elijah toil in his brother's lair,

Mehalah searches for a spot away from her mother and Elijah to consider how she might escape from Red Hall. She walks the field and ascends the sea-wall, pressing to the border of her new setting and gaining a view of the sea. The sea-wall is a literal threshold between land and sea, almost abstract in its clear-cut demarcation. It becomes the point where Mehalah hereafter returns to contemplate her literal and abstract freedom. “Red Hall and its marshes were to her a prison, and freedom was beyond its sea-wall” (208). Mehalah of course prefers open spaces as on the Ray. From the vantage point of the sea-wall, between the restriction of Red Hall and the freedom of the open sea, Mehalah gazes upon the horizon, which becomes for her a picture for development towards the infinite.

This first night at Red Hall, however, the sea view is muddled by an overcast and darkening sky. Mehalah finds it difficult to think on how she and her mother will escape. She decides to look out to the sea for any passing ship, the sight of which she determines to take as a good omen. No ship comes. Mehalah sits beneath the windmill, which casts water into the sea in a “painfully” creaking repetition. As night approaches, Mehalah is made to think on and even experience the repetition of Grimshoe by a distant beam of a light-ship,¹⁵ resembling a rapid waxing and waning of the moon, and the sound of the repetitious windmill:

Far away, out to sea, as the darkness deepened, gleamed a light. It gleamed a moment, then grew dim and disappeared in the blackness. A minute, and then it waxed, but waned again, and once more all was night. So on, in wearisome iteration. What she saw was the revolving Swin light fifteen miles from land, a floating Pharos. She thought of Elijah’s words, she

¹⁵ A light-ship is a stationary vessel that shines a light in order to direct other ships away from dangerous parts of the coastline. These were used along the Essex coastline when a lighthouse could not be stably erected because of the sandy under-bed.

As one might expect, the Swin was an actual light-ship off the Essex coast near Mersea (though I have not determined what time period it was actually in use), and Baring-Gould, some years after *Mehalah*, wrote another novel (his eighth) about the Essex marshland called *Richard Cable, the Lightshipman* (serialised in *Chamber's Journal*, Vol. 4. 1887).

thought of the horrible iterations in the barrow on the hill, the embracing and fighting, embracing and fighting, loving and hating, loving and hating, till one should conquer of the twin but rival powers. (169)

Mehalah looks for a passing ship as a sign of her eventual freedom, and she instead sees a permanently stationary ship projecting an endless cycle of light and dark. The sea, associated with freedom and escape, is convoluted by a reminder of the land-locked ship of Grimshoe, an idea opposite to the free ocean.

And so ends the novel's sixteenth of thirty chapters. The protagonist's chief difficulty in the novel has been established as moving beyond a place of no change and no progress, breaking out of a cycle like Grimshoe into an active, developing freedom.

Mehalah's experience at the sea-wall is a further layering and intensification of the opening setting, bringing to mind all of the amazingly diverse arrangements of setting in the novel's first half, and the considerable time spent unfolding these arrangements for the reader. The threshold setting has been remade over and over: in the locals; in the conflict of the main characters, their internal thresholds, and their dependent family members; in the homes of the Ray, Red Hall, and the Pandora; and in the Grimshoe choice. The conceptual threshold of the novel's central conflict between freedom and restriction is carried through and presented differently in each of these arrangements.

***Mehalah* and the Oxford Movement**

Mehalah is a book exhibiting Baring-Gould's numerous interpretations of a place. One can certainly see that, during his ten-year stay, his mind was inundated

with the Mersea environment. As I have shown throughout this chapter, Baring-Gould's development of his Gothic novel and Gothic threshold was greatly shaped by ideas from his personal and influential Tractarian philosophy.

But is *Mehalah* merely an illustration of *Origin*, an allegorical rendering of its precepts? One text that provides insight into what Baring-Gould thought about his own writing—and its reception—is Baring-Gould's preface to his fifth novel *Court Royal* (1886).¹⁶ In this preface he muses on the earlier reception of *Mehalah* (his third novel), which itself lacks any such explanatory preface:

When in 1880 the author published 'Mehalah,' his critics, public and private, attacked him or remonstrated with him because there was no moral to the story—because 'Mehalah' was not, as the Germans would say, a *Tendenzroman*.¹⁷ No doubt that life is but an acted Æsop's Fables, in which the actors are human, but it is surely allowable in an author to take wings occasionally, and fly away from the stings and goads of moral applications which prod one in everyday life, into the region of unmoralising fancy. (v)

Along with other Tractarians, Baring-Gould felt that his society, and its religion in particular, were too focused on moral applications; perhaps Baring-Gould felt that morality was given too much attention over the “fanciful” mystic spirituality of the Tractarians. Many critics gave a negative or at least puzzled review of *Mehalah* because it seemed so exceedingly purposeless. Like *Origin*, *Mehalah* was considered a strange and unprofitable work (Wawman 84), though it sold well, was well-liked by the public, and gradually made its author famous.

From Baring-Gould's sarcastic response we must take warning against reducing *Mehalah* to a simple moral or illustration. In his irony Baring-Gould expresses the idea that *Mehalah* possesses the complexity and ambivalence of real human experience. It is a rewarding opportunity to study a philosophical book and a

¹⁶ *Court Royal*, 3 vols., London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1886.

¹⁷ A novel of purpose. Such a novel explicitly addressed social evils or taught a moral.

novel by the same author, but I would be doing *Mehalah* a disservice if I were to suggest that *Origin* “unlocks” it. The novel has much more to offer. Nonetheless, the influence of *Origin* is there, and it is strong.

In the *Court Royal* preface Baring-Gould goes on to say that *John Herring*,¹⁸ his novel following *Mehalah*, *did* contain a moral, “that man’s character is only moulded by mistakes” (vi), but most reviewers, he says, did not see it. So in *Court Royal*, he says, he is determined to have a purpose and state it plainly beforehand.

To explain this purpose he relates *Court Royal*’s conception. He states that once, while returning from holiday, he heard the account of a struggling mother who decided to sell her daughter in order to give her a better life and ease her own poverty.

Baring-Gould says that he

occupied and amused himself, during his railway journey home, in trying to work out what would be the moral and mental result in such an instance, supposing the child to be a girl endowed by nature with generous emotions and considerable shrewdness. (vii)

Such a girl, he imagined,

would be typical of the individualism and impatience of restraint, social, moral, and religious, combined with impulsive generosity, which is the feature of the new civilisation, about also to be the motive force of the future, that is coming everywhere to the front.

Recently having read a report about the diminishing fortunes of a family of Polish aristocrats, Baring-Gould considered what the effect might be if his hypothetical modern girl of the “new civilisation” were to have been adopted by such an ancient family of the nobility. Baring-Gould envisages this hypothetical family as

steeped in traditional culture, infused with feudal-Christian morality, as the representative of the old civilisation which is melting and disappearing everywhere, as the other becomes concrete and asserts itself. (vii-viii)

¹⁸ *John Herring: A West of England Romance*, London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1883.

Baring-Gould states that various questions arose as he pondered what might result from the intimate meeting of such opposite “representatives”:

Would each act on the other at all, to modify its peculiarities and broaden its view of life? To take another simile, would such a vein of molten, fiery, nineteenth-century individuality, operating vertically, do other than shatter the superincumbent, horizontal social beds? Would it be itself at all metamorphosed in the process?

Baring-Gould states that he “was teased by the problem that rose continually in his brain” (viii) until he felt that he could only

work it out by calling his representative characters out of the vasty deep of conjecture, and setting them on the table, giving them souls, and letting them move and act towards each other automatically, and work out the problem for themselves. (viii-ix)

Baring-Gould’s description of this creative practice brings to mind Elijah’s statement about God constructing the mechanical “board” of Mersea Island. Elijah says that God’s breath gets into some of his creation, so that “God himself can’t count on them [...]. They go where they list, and do what they will” (*Mehalah* 281). Perhaps their author couldn’t count on his “automatic” creations either. Elijah seems to have developed a relative “independence”; as Fowles says

Rebow comes to us as pure brute, but in a series of magnificent set speeches towards the end of the book, speeches of a Puritanical iron and fire (his own preferred images) he develops into something altogether more profound. (*Mehalah* xii)

(Perhaps “independence” is not the right word; as I will discuss in Chapter Three, Elijah arguably becomes more like his author.)

Baring-Gould says that *Mehalah* is “unmoralising fancy,” but we might suppose that it, like his other novels, with their shared themes, might have developed somewhat similarly to *Court Royal*. Perhaps the explicated genesis of *Court Royal* indicates a technique, conscious or unconscious, in Baring-Gould’s novel-writing. In

this case, upon reaching a philosophical or mental limit, Baring-Gould might transfer his ideas into novel form by making “real” creatures out of conjecture and allowing them to “work out the problem for themselves.” As in *Court Royal*, the conflict of *Mehalah* is that of opposites, “modern” “individualism and impatience of restraint” versus a “feudal lord.” Appropriately, the “table” that Baring-Gould sets his “representative characters” upon in the case of *Mehalah* is a Gothic threshold; on this ambivalent and paradoxical foundation they are to “work out the problem.”

Baring-Gould’s many novels and short stories contain a few oft-recurring subjects, most notably the “Gothic” plot of the strong, impoverished female protagonist, sought after and at times antagonized by a significantly older and wealthier man. The purpose of *Court Royal*, as Baring-Gould describes it, is not to present a moral, but rather to consider a question. His novel’s recurring themes suggest that Baring-Gould was trying to work out a question not only in one novel, but over the span of numerous novels and other works.

Mehalah might be thought of then, in part, as a continued working out of the thoughts of *Origin*, using the materials of Baring-Gould’s strange home of Mersea. Perhaps there is no practical moral to learn from in *Mehalah*, but it is itself a philosophical searching and shuffling after some truth and purpose. In fact, Baring-Gould, “teased by the problem that rose continually in his brain” (viii), resembles his own character of Mehalah, whose mind, like Baring-Gould’s, is similarly possessed by thoughts on Grimshoe and the rest.

Surprisingly, the influence of Baring-Gould’s philosophy gives an elegance and force to the novel. This is because *Mehalah* is not a one-to-one allegorical

illustration of the arguments in *Origin*. Rather, ideas from *Origin* (integrated on the Gothic threshold) provide a dynamic setting for *Mehalah*, a rough “physics” of the novel which gives the characters weight and motion as they relate to other characters and their world. This dynamic setting, combining concepts such as the dialectic, conciliation, and negation with the Gothic threshold, instills subtle meaning and consistency throughout.

As with Elijah, this dynamic allows development of characters in unexpected ways, apart from an allegorical fixedness. *Mehalah* can participate in her own vague searches for meaning without containing excessive meaning within herself. She is allowed to “take up” the author’s philosophical question and “work it out” for herself—and possibly fail at this task.

Novels normally recognized as emerging from the Oxford Movement have a recognizable Tractarian message—usually dealing directly with issues such as the dark temptation to convert to Roman Catholicism (heroically avoided) and expressions of the rightness and goodness of Catholic churches, Catholic clergymen, and Catholic living. Lengthy expositions on religious subjects can be expected to emerge occasionally within the progression of the plot.

For instance, consider *John Inglesant*¹⁹ by Joseph Henry Shorthouse, published in 1881, though privately printed in 1880, the same year as *Mehalah*. Like *Mehalah*, *John Inglesant* is a historical novel, set in the middle of the seventeenth century, around the time of the English Civil War. The eponymous hero is a young Anglican, educated by Jesuits, who must resist the temptation to become a Roman Catholic. John, like *Mehalah*, is drawn by mystical callings from the spiritual world.

¹⁹ *John Inglesant: A Romance*, London: Macmillan, 1881.

He becomes involved in interactions between the Roman Catholic Church and High Church Anglicans, eventually becoming a courtier of Charles I. He joins the Royalists during the Civil War. John's brother is murdered and he tracks the murderer to Italy, where he has many adventures and even witnesses the Papal Conclave electing a new Pope. Included with these solidly wrought historical adventures are lengthy discussions on Arminianism, Quietism, the Papacy, etc.

Like *John Inglesant*, Baring-Gould's first known work of fiction has a Civil War setting, a novella entitled *The Chorister: A Tale of King's College Chapel in the Civil Wars* (1856).²⁰ *The Chorister* was apparently written for the close group of friends in Baring-Gould's Tractarian "Holy Club" at Cambridge. The story has a dominantly Tractarian tone. It dramatizes a legend (invented by Baring-Gould?) concerning the preservation of the stained glass of King's College Chapel by Catholic-minded church members from the Protestant forces of Cromwell.²¹ Because of its significant religious conflict involving extreme Protestantism and loyal Anglicans, the Civil War was a favorite period of consideration for Tractarians.

John Inglesant has always been well known as a Tractarian novel, and *The Chorister* is easily recognizable as a Tractarian text. *Mehalah* has never been considered a Tractarian novel, which is not surprising, since it is nothing like the typical Tractarian novel. The protagonist is not an Anglo-Catholic. No one in the novel is. In fact, as I will discuss in the third chapter, the *most* Anglo-Catholic

²⁰ *The Chorister: A Tale of King's College Chapel in the Civil Wars*. Herefordshire: Praxis Books, 2004 [1856].

²¹ King's College Chapel was visible outside Baring-Gould's room window at neighboring Clare College. Like all of Baring-Gould's historical fiction, the historical subject is consciously related by the author to the issues of his day.

character is the Calvinist villain Elijah. The novel is as much about the absence of Tractarianism as it is its presence.

As a result, *Mehalah* is not included in any discussions of the Anglo-Catholic novel-writing tradition. Baring-Gould receives no mention in surveys like *The Novel and the Oxford Movement*.²² His only mention in *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement*²³ is a quotation from Baring-Gould's biography on Robert Stephen Hawker.

Nonetheless, *Mehalah* is of the Oxford Movement. Baring-Gould described the truths of Catholicism as responding to a universal dialectic. His novel's characters need not be Catholic Christians to fit within that system. In fact, an active dialectic and spirituality in the absence of a definite Catholic presence is in direct accordance with the ideas of *Origin*, since that work explicitly works from the premise that such forces are at work even apart from religion and Catholicism. The internal "Revelation" of the dialectic spoken of in *Origin* is present in the novel's dynamic setting and characters.

Thus I must contest the contention of many scholars that *John Inglesant* is the Oxford Movement's "highest achievement in fiction form" (Spurgeon 4).²⁴ *John Inglesant* is well-written, with historical, philosophical, and mystical strengths, but I consider *Mehalah*, on its strengths as a novel, to surpass it. As I have argued, a chief strength of *Mehalah* is a complex seamless blending of philosophy with the Gothic

²² Joseph Ellis Baker, *The Novel and the Oxford Movement*, New York: Russell, 1965 [1932].

²³ Raymond Chapman, *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970.

²⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *J. Henry Shorthouse, "The Author of John Inglesant,"* Universal Publishers, 2003.

threshold, providing “contested” spaces within which the characters, who are integrally involved in this setting, move, act, and battle.

Baring-Gould is not recognized for his contributions to the philosophy of the second wave of the Oxford Movement; nor is *Mehalah* and his body of fiction recognized as a contribution to the literature of the Oxford Movement. These neglected contributions are linked, as *Mehalah* can be identified not only with Tractarianism, but with a particular development within the second wave of the Oxford Movement as developed by Baring-Gould and others and taken up in *Lux Mundi*. The first-generation Oxford Movement looked to the past in order to emulate the true Church. This interest in the past was not lost in the Oxford Movement’s second wave, but there was also a philosophical development towards conciliating the past and modernity within Catholic dogma. In this way the second wave is relatable to Gothic fiction, which draws together the ancient and modern in the unity of the Gothic text.

Being partially influenced by *Origin*, *Mehalah* is a Gothic Tractarian novel that responds to the philosophical attempt of the second wave to address modern anxieties, and particularly those felt by Baring-Gould, by wrestling with the tensions between ancient and modern ways of thinking.

Mehalah asks Elijah why he has told her the ghost story of Grimshoe, and we might ask why Baring-Gould has told it to us in his novel. Elijah’s answer is that the Gothic story relates to the conflict between him and *Mehalah*, and likewise Baring-Gould’s Gothic novel relates to the issues of his day.

Baring-Gould understood the Catholic Church as aiding the individual and society in the difficult advancement through conciliation of the numerous dialectic oppositions. Mehalah is depicted as a spiritually searching person without such aid. Baring-Gould felt that the oppositions of the traditional and the modern in his day seemed to be separating more and more. Baring-Gould blamed negation and specialization. He felt that these schisms needed to be repaired in order to retain the indefinite between opposites which allows the space to continue mankind's progress. The tale of Grimshoe presents Baring-Gould's idea of schism in its extreme: an endless battle of antagonistic twins who are trapped inside a stagnant enclosed space, cut off from any possible progress.

Mehalah's conceptual threshold of restriction and freedom is built on the foundation of the traditional Gothic opposition of the ancient and the modern. Grimshoe and Red Hall are "Gothic" and associated with restriction. Mehalah desires to escape the restraints suggested by pre-determined fate and an ancient, ever-repeating battle, though these do hold a fascination for her. Water in the novel is associated with what Baring-Gould describes in the *Court Royal* preface as a modern impatience for liquidity and change. As in *Court Royal*, each side in *Mehalah* acts on the other, performing a "metamorphosis" through their interaction. Furthermore, their interaction becomes ambivalent in accordance with the Gothic threshold and Baring-Gould's Tractarian philosophy: the ancient and modern are presented as distinct yet paradoxical sides of a single thing, and so using their opposition as guideposts becomes confusing.

In the next chapter I will discuss this ambivalent Gothic battle between old and new as it plays out into the novel's second half, in which Mehalah lives at "Gothic" Red Hall. Furthermore I will examine how Baring-Gould made connections between the Victorian controversies and *Mehalah's* historical setting of the time of the French Revolution. I will argue that *Mehalah's* historical setting and the influence of *Wuthering Heights* reinforce *Mehalah's* use of the "Gothic threshold" structure and contribute to its theme of ambivalent progress.

Chapter Two

Mehalah in Context, Part I: The French Revolution

On the subject of her internal arrangements, discomforts, and requirements, Mrs. De Witt had afforded her son information more copious than interesting. Her digestion sympathised with all the convulsions then shaking Europe. Revolutions were brought about there by the most ordinary edibles, and were always to be reduced by spirituous drinkables. (*Mehalah* 90)

For this chapter I will discuss *Mehalah* as a historical Gothic novel, set in rural Essex at the time of the French Revolution. The purpose of this chapter is to study *Mehalah* in the context of Baring-Gould's understanding of the French Revolution, which I will accomplish by examining the works written by Baring-Gould in the years leading up to *Mehalah*, along with other related works. I will be considering how Baring-Gould connected the French Revolution with the analogous clash of new and old ways of thinking in his own time to which *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* was a response. A good starting point then is *Mehalah*'s first "revolt" against Elijah after she is forced to move to Red Hall.

Mehalah is determined to escape Red Hall, but, like so much haunted architecture of the Gothic tradition, it seems incessantly to draw her back. She first seeks work and shelter in the nearby twin villages of Salcott and Virley, but Elijah's influence is strong there, and the locals are completely unwilling to defy "the master" (184). One resident tells her that she must "go out of the reach of Rebow's arm" if she is to find work (185). Salcott and Virley clearly operate as "feudal" villages under the control of the "lord" of Red Hall. To further complicate her quest, *Mehalah* has gained the hurtful reputation of being "that wench of Rebow's" (187).

Moving a few miles further from Red Hall, Mehalah eventually does find an offer of work and lodging at the Rose Inn in Peldon. Her downtrodden spirit soars at this victory over her oppressor. Yet when she takes her reluctant mother by boat to their new home, Elijah greets her at the dock and threatens to send Mrs. Sharland to prison for her failure to compensate his loss on the Ray. With her mother in no condition to survive such treatment, a shocked and defeated Mehalah is forced to return in virtual captivity to Red Hall. Once again Mehalah's burdensome mother is used by Elijah in order to limit her.

Mehalah's attempted escape takes place on Valentine's Day, and Elijah humiliates Mehalah by forcing her to ride home in his gig as his Valentine, so that she is confirmed as his mistress in the eyes of those in Salcott and Virley from whom she had defended herself.¹

Mehalah is wounded by this failed revolt even more so than by her initial move to Red Hall. She had been forced to submit to Elijah's will then, but she maintained hope that escape was possible. When these hopes are crushed, she feels that she really has no freedom at all: "Mehalah descended, crushed, broken, no more herself, the bold haughty girl of the Ray. She crept upstairs, took off her red cap and tore it with her hands and teeth. Her liberty was for ever gone from her" (200). Mehalah relates her loss of freedom to her tearing of the *bonnet rouge* of the French revolutionaries.

¹ Elijah says the following humiliating words to one of the Virley farmers during the trip home, equating Mehalah with one of his cattle: "I tell you," he said, "one of my cattle has been straying, I don't suppose she has done damage; she got into this here yard, I'm told. You turned her out. I'm a man of few words, but I thank ye. I am carrying her home before she is pounded." (*Mehalah* 199)

Mehalah later speaks of Elijah as an animal as well: "You are nothing to me but a coarse, ill-conditioned dog" (205).

In an empty room of Red Hall, Mehalah mourns until nightfall at a window facing the Ray. The transcendent sight of a familiar star engages her and recalls the painfully distant memory of a happier and freer time:

A year had passed since, on such an evening as this, looking on that star, she had stood with George de Witt on the Ray beneath the thorn-trees, and he had gaily called her his Valentine, and given her in jest a picture of the Goddess of Liberty as proclaimed in Paris, wearing the *bonnet rouge*. She a goddess! She who was now so weak. Her power was gone. Liberty! She had none. She was a slave. (201)

This mention of “the Goddess of Liberty, as proclaimed in Paris,” and Mehalah’s red cap are reminders of the historical setting of the book. Mehalah’s failed revolt against Elijah and the muddling of her “revolutionary” ideals are strongly connected with this historical setting.

An introductory paragraph of the novel places the story at “the close of the last century” (2). In the fourth chapter the time is further specified as Mersea locals observe a British war schooner off the beach of “Mersea City” (the town of West Mersea):

War had been declared with France some time, but as yet had not interfered with the smuggling trade, which was carried on with the Low Countries. Cruisers in the Channel had made it precarious work along the South Coast, and this had rather stimulated the activity of contraband traffic on the East. It was therefore with no little uneasiness that a warship was observed standing off the Mersea flats. (*Mehalah* 45)

The locals soon learn that the ship is recruiting for the French Wars, which Britain entered in 1793. Thus the novel takes place “some time” after 1793 and before 1800—in the midst of the French Revolution (1789-99) and in the aftermath of the Reign of Terror (1793-94).

Baring-Gould and the French Revolution

Having established *Mehalah*'s historical setting, I will now consider what such a setting might imply by analyzing Baring-Gould's thoughts on the French Revolution, particularly as expressed in his writings in the years leading up to *Mehalah*. In this way I will reveal a further resonance between *Mehalah* and *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* as responses to Victorian religious controversy. Furthermore, such a study will provide context for *Mehalah*'s aspirations towards progress and the ambivalence of this progress.

Baring-Gould grew up in a world discussing Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History* (1837),² one of those great texts that baptized the Victorian era and molded its cultural consciousness. As Mark Philp explains, British politics and culture were heavily influenced by the revolutionary activity in France at the end of the eighteenth century:

The British government faced widespread, organised pressure for parliamentary reform, and a public which had been so encouraged to flirt with republicanism in Paine's works, that the social and political elite had felt it necessary to organise to an unprecedented extent in defence of the status quo and the constitution. But, by this time, the example of France had come to play an increasingly complex role for people in Britain: many who had originally supported developments were now distressed by the increasing bloodshed and the increasing radicalism of the Revolution; others now looked to France as the way ahead. (8)³

The French Revolution provoked complicated and oppositional responses, as in Carlyle's work; nonetheless these varied responses was certainly all an engagement with the tension between ancient and modern ideas. The driving spirit of the French Revolution was the overthrowing of the *ancien régime*. Advocating the inalienable rights of the individual, the revolutionaries rather swiftly overcame the interrelated,

² *The French Revolution: A History*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1896 [1837].

³ Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

“feudal” powers of the French absolute monarchy, the aristocracy, and the Roman Catholic Church.

The principles of the Revolution were drawn from eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking. Though the Enlightenment contained various and at times opposed philosophies, those associated with the movement generally shared some core inclinations: a questioning of traditional institutions and traditional ways of thinking, a focus on rational and scientific understanding, and a promotion of the freedom of the individual to develop without unreasonable restraints. Furthermore, the French Revolution vitally appropriated the Enlightenment emphasis on progress, which was based on a clear conception of movement from old ways to newer, better ways.

As displayed in his writings, Baring-Gould held a sustained interest in the French Revolution throughout his life, likely in part because of his childhood travels on the continent, during which fourteen-year-old Sabine and his family made a dramatic escape from the erupting start of France’s Revolution of 1848. From an early age, Baring-Gould developed a deep interest in European history, and particularly the religious aspects of this history.

Baring-Gould also read Dickens, who in 1859 released his own Carlyle-influenced depiction of the Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* (Baring-Gould was twenty-four at the time). Dickens was one of the few novelists that Baring-Gould admitted to reading. His enjoyment of Dickens developed during his boyhood, as Baring-Gould mentions in an autobiographical account of 1839:

One drawback to going abroad had been the publication in numbers of Nicholas Nickleby. [...] Odd as it may seem, I think that one reason for inducing my father to spend the winter in Cologne was that he might be more certain to obtain the issues of that story as they came out

[...]. No one at the present day can imagine the expectation, the breathless intent, wherewith the monthly numbers of the novels of Dickens were looked forward to and devoured. The style was so new, so humorous [*sic*], and so full of pathos, and the characters were so unlike any hithertoo [*sic*] drawn in fiction, save by Fielding and Smollett; and their tales were disfigured by grossnesses'' (*Early Reminiscences* 25).⁴

Despite the waning interest in the idea of revolution during the prosperous 1850s and '60s, Dickens retained an interest in the Revolution because he (like Baring-Gould) saw it as relevant to his present-day. *A Tale of Two Cities* begins with its famous comparison of London and Paris, ending with

the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (35)⁵

Dickens felt the political calm of Britain to be portentous. He feared the quiet discontent of the lower classes and advocated for social reform in part to preserve the nation from revolution.⁶ Nonetheless, because of the then thriving state of Britain, many who read *A Tale of Two Cities* were more inclined to be assured by descriptions of the stability of the British than disturbed by similarities drawn between the French and British.

Though political tensions calmed mid-century, religious controversy reached its height. *A Tale of Two Cities* was published the same year as *On the Origin of Species*, and was likely to some extent responding to the "revolutionary" fermentation of scientific ideas that preceded Darwin's work. Throughout the 1860s other novels

⁴ For more information on Baring-Gould's debt to Dickens, see Trezise's "Dickensian Influences on the Life and Work of Sabine Baring-Gould." *Dickens Quarterly*. 15:2 (June 1998): 123-132.

⁵ *A Tale of Two Cities*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970 [1859].

⁶ In a letter of 1855 Dickens writes: "I believe the discontent to be so much the worse for smouldering, instead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned by any one of a thousand accidents – a bad harvest – the last strain too much of aristocratic insolence or incapacity – a defeat abroad – a mere chance at home – into such a devil of a conflagration as never has been beheld since." Dickens to A. H. Layard, 10 April, 1855, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch, 1938) II, 655.

on the Revolution and its aftermath appeared, including Hugo's *Les Miserables* (1862), Walter Thornbury's *Wildfire* (1864), Henry Kingsley's *Mademoiselle Mathilde*, and Margaret Roberts' *On the Edge of the Storm* (1869).

In the 1870s economic troubles returned and class tensions increased, providing a grim material counterpoint to the intellectual schisms that had burst forth in more flourishing times. This decade bridged the writing of *Origin* and *Mehalah*, and perhaps added to the disappointment Baring-Gould felt during his time on Mersea Island.

The French revolutionaries of the 1790s had hoped to begin a new society unhindered by the unnaturally restrictive ways of the past. From 1793-1805 they adopted a new method for telling time entirely, the French Republican Calendar. This calendar sought to remove religious influence, replacing the seven-day week of *Genesis* with a ten-day week and of course replacing such dating conventions as *Anno Domini*. The French Republican Calendar was used again during the revolution of the Paris Commune⁷ in March-May 1871, only a year after Baring-Gould's *Origin* and in the midst of Baring-Gould's first novels, which I will now discuss.

Uprisings such as the French Revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870 caused ripple-like disturbances throughout Europe. In their own agitated political climate, many Britons were anxious to hear the sounds of revolution again. Ignited during the French Revolution, Ireland remained a site for potential revolution. Renewed British cries for equal representation, instability throughout Europe, and

⁷ The Paris Commune was an uprising of dissatisfied workers who seized power in Paris following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the election of a royalist majority in the National Assembly which threatened a reinstatement of a royal component in government. Though a failure, the Commune was praised by Marx, Engels, and others as a prototype for future revolutions and proletarian governments.

actual revolts like the Commune were renewed reminders in the second half of the nineteenth century of the French Revolution and its legacy in the challenging transition into modernity. Baring-Gould's novel writing began in this agitated atmosphere.

The First Novels

Baring-Gould's first three novels—*Through Flood and Flame* (1868),⁸ *In Exitu Israel* (1870),⁹ and *Mehalah* (1880)—consider clashes between new and old ways of thinking. His first work of fiction, the novella *The Chorister* (1856), was a precursor in this respect, dealing as it did, from overt Anglo-Catholic sentiments, with the clash between the Protestants against the “old” order of Catholic Anglicans.

Baring-Gould's first novel, *Through Flood and Flame*, is a semi-autobiographical novel representing, with some alterations, the story of Baring-Gould's own unusual courtship and marriage. The novel was so personal that Baring-Gould later attempted to have all copies destroyed. Whether his embarrassment was because of the subject or its treatment is difficult to say. Some embarrassment may have arisen from Baring-Gould's use of real-life models as the basis for many of his characters.

In 1864, at the age of thirty, a recently ordained Baring-Gould began his first curacy in the rural Yorkshire town of Horbury, a mill-town that had been radically shaped by the Industrial Revolution (Horbury was in fact in 1812 the site of the most destructive Luddite revolt). Baring-Gould was allowed by the rector to work

⁸ *Through Flood and Flame*, London: Bentley, 1868.

⁹ *In Exitu Israel: An Historical Novel*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan and Co., 1870.

independently in an area called Horbury Bridge. Two years later, Baring-Gould met and fell in love with Grace Taylor, a poor, sixteen-year-old mill girl. When Baring-Gould married Grace two years later on 25 May 1868, she was eighteen and he was thirty-four.

In many ways this unconventional union was a marriage of opposites: Baring-Gould was much older, wealthy, of the gentry, and educated at Cambridge; Grace was a young woman from a poor, mill-working family, uneducated and with a thick West Yorkshire accent. Such a match was of course extremely rare, and both families were against it, predicting that the incongruous pairing would necessarily end in sorrow and regret. Nonetheless, the two agreed to marry.

Through Flood and Flame was published in 1868, the same year as Grace and Sabine's marriage. In the novel, the details of their story are changed, so that the protagonist Hugh is an orphaned son of a clergyman who works at his upper-middle-class uncle's Yorkshire mill. The uncle being childless, Hugh is expected to inherit. Within the first chapter Hugh has met and been smitten by a young woman, Annis, who works at the mill. Their desire to marry creates all sorts of difficulties, including opposition from family and the community. Nonetheless, they pass through the "flood and flame" of various trials to eventually achieve their goal of marriage.

At one point Hugh's uncle threatens his nephew with disinheritance if he continues his relationship with a lower-class girl. As I noted in the previous chapter, Baring-Gould had himself been threatened with disinheritance by his father a few years before writing the novel. He, the first son, was traditionally expected to become squire, but Baring-Gould felt that he must join the Anglican priesthood. The

sting of his father's threat was doubtless still fresh during the novel's creation.

Baring-Gould married Grace at a time when he fully expected his inheritance to pass to his younger brother, and for a while he considered taking up the post of a foreign missionary. *Through Flood and Flame*—and even more so Baring-Gould's own actual marriage—reveal his at times radical views on issues of tradition and change.

Baring-Gould's second novel, *In Exitu Israel: An Historical Novel*, is related to, yet very different from its predecessor. Baring-Gould describes the novel in its preface as depicting “a side to the History of the French Revolution which is too generally overlooked—its ecclesiastical side” (*In Exitu* vii).¹⁰ The novel's title is taken from the traditional Latin name for Psalm 114, which begins “When Israel went out of Egypt . . .” This victorious psalm celebrates the exodus of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. In the novel, Baring-Gould applies the exodus concept to the struggles between Church (Israel) and State (Egypt) during the French Revolution—or, more rightly, struggles between the “Church-minded” clergy and those with more material motivations.

Apparently, Baring-Gould saw the “remarkable” Constitutional Church of the Revolution, “at once Republican and Catholic” (*In Exitu* vii), as, like the Anglican Church, a flowering of reformed Catholicism. Though the Constitutional Church was

¹⁰ In a letter to his sister of 6 August 1877, Mark Twain briefly describes a series of books he has read related to the French Revolution, including “two or three minor works” by Victor Hugo as well as *Les Misérables* (1862), Carlyle's “wonderful” *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), Charles D. Yonge's *Life of Marie Antionette* (1876), etc. Included in this list is *In Exitu Israel*: “I followed that [Yonge's work] with ‘In Exitu Israel,’ a very able novel by Baring-Gould, the purpose of which is to show the effect of some of the most odious of the privileges of the French nobles under l'ancien régime [*sic*], & of the discharging of the Catholic Church by the National Assembly in ‘92.”

—Clemens, Samuel, L. to Mary P. (Mollie) Fairbanks, 6 Aug 1877, Elmira, N.Y. (MS: Union Catalog of Clemens Letters. 01467). 2007.

<<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL01467.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>>

under government control, the novel depicts the efforts of some clergy to remain devoted to spiritual matters and maintain religious independence.

Baring-Gould then applies the title *In Exitu Israel* to his own day, particularly to the sentiment held by many persecuted Tractarians of the 1860s that the Anglican Church should be more independent from State influence and perhaps divorced from the State altogether.¹¹ Tensions in the Anglican Church remained following the persecution and expulsion of dissenting Wesleyans and, more recently, the harassment of Tractarians, some of whom had left for the Roman Catholic Church. Baring-Gould states that such this persecuting force was still active, “hunting out and repressing the most active section of the Church” (*In Exitu* ix). By this section he of course refers to Tractarians. The “hunting” and “repressing” force was found in the upper levels of both the British government and the Anglican Church. Five years later the Public Worship Regulation Act (1875) would be passed, an act which made Tractarian-influenced services and “Ritualism” illegal.¹²

¹¹ The Irish Church Disestablishment Act (26 July 1869), a “revolutionary” act of sorts, with its fervent detractors and supporters, had passed the year before the publication of *In Exitu Israel*. Presented by Gladstone, the act abolished the State’s bond with the Church of Ireland, a body resented by the Catholic and nonconformist majority of Ireland, who were forced to support it through taxes. The act was one of many attempts by parliament to make Ireland’s union with Britain more palatable. It was a religious “revolution” in the sense that it overthrew the established structure in accordance with popular opinion, and for the purpose of quelling a political revolution.

Baring-Gould mentions this disestablishment in his preface to *In Exitu Israel*: “The disestablishment of the English Church will present a feature absent from that of the Irish Church. In the latter case, there was an unanimous opposition to the measure by all within it [Irish Anglicans]; but, in the event of the severance of the union in England, it will take place amid the joyous acclamations of no inconsiderable section of its best and truest sons” (x-xi).

¹² The Public Worship Regulation Act (1875) established a court with the power to try and convict any priest who practiced ritualism in Anglican worship. Such ritualism would include any non-standard ornamentation or significant deviation from the Book of Common Prayer. Anglo-Catholics and others decried this act as another example of heavy government influence on ecclesiastical matters. The act remained until 1906, during which time many parsons were brought to trial and five imprisoned.

This act is reminiscent of the Combination Acts (1799, 1800), which inhibited talk of reform and likewise attempted to protect Britain from foreign influences.

As this dual application of the title suggests, *In Exitu Israel* relates throughout to both Baring-Gould's own time and that of the French Revolution: "My object in writing this story is to illustrate the currents of feeling in the State and Church of France in 1789, currents not altogether unlike those now circulating in our own" (*In Exitu* vii). Baring-Gould continues this double perspective throughout the novel, describing France as it was during the French Revolution, and then as in his day, making various comments of comparison. He was well-enough versed in details of the Revolution to draw as many comparisons as he desired.

In the preface to *In Exitu* Baring-Gould offers his feelings about the ideals and excesses of the French Revolution:

If, from the following pages, it appears that my sympathies are with the National Assembly, and those who upset the *ancien régime*, it does not follow that they are with the Revolution in its excesses. The true principles of the Revolution are embodied in the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man. 'Write at the head of that Declaration the name of God,' said Grégoire; 'or you establish rights without duties, which is but another thing for proclaiming Force to be supreme,' The Assembly refused. Grégoire was right. (xi)

This statement by Gregoire must have made a great impact on Baring-Gould, because he discusses the same quotation in *Origin*. In both texts he argues that "true" freedom cannot exist for long apart from a recognition of God. Certainly Baring-Gould's religious treatise *Origin*, written alongside *In Exitu*, was considered by its author to be integrally tied to the questions of freedom and progress brought to the forefront by the French Revolution, as well as questions raised by the religious controversies of his own day.

In Exitu is a consideration of the excesses in the Revolution and in Baring-Gould's own day—the excesses of modern thought and the excesses of reactions against it. By mentioning the Assembly's refusal to put God's name at the head of

the “Declaration,” Baring-Gould is directly relating the Revolution with the general secularization of modernity.

Writing on Saints in Modern Times

During his time at East Mersea, Baring-Gould took up a formidable task—formidable even for him—of compiling a sixteen-volume reference series entitled *The Lives of the Saints* (1872-77, New ed. 1914).¹³ This massive text, written in the years between *Origin* and *Mehalah*, records a myriad of saints and a summation of their lives, all grouped according to saint’s days. *The Lives of the Saints* was very much a Tractarian text in that it acknowledged a pedigree, legacy, and transmission of power and authority from the ancient Church to the Victorian Anglican Church.

In selecting from the vast storehouses of hagiography, Baring-Gould adopted various criteria: rational, archaeological, aesthetic, etc (*Lives*, Part I, vii), but of course his chief motivation was piety: “I have been called to tread holy ground, and kneel in the midst of the great company of the blessed; and the only fitting attitude of the mind for such a place, and such society, is reverence” (*Lives*, Part I, ix).

Baring-Gould recommends a proper attitude for his modern reader as well:

In reading the miracles recorded of the Saints, of which the number is infinite, the proper spirit to observe is, not doubt, but discrimination. Because much is certainly apocryphal in these accounts, we must not therefore reject what may be true. The present age, in its vehement naturalism, places itself, as it were, outside of the circle of spiritual phenomena, and is as likely to deny the supernatural agency in a marvel, as a mediaeval was liable to attribute a natural phenomenon to spiritual causes. In such cases we must consider the evidence and its worth or worthlessness. (*Lives*, Part I, ix)

Here Baring-Gould establishes a mirror-like opposition between his present, modern age and the medieval age. As with Baring-Gould’s other works of the time, *The Lives*

¹³ *The Lives of the Saints*, New and Rev. Ed, 16 vols., Edinburgh : J. Grant, 1914 [1st ed., 1872].

of the Saints was written with a thought to what he saw as the modern pendulum-swing towards excessively rational and materialistic thinking: “vehement naturalism.” Baring-Gould saw this secularization as *specialization*, a dismissal of spiritual truths in light of material truths. Conversely, he understood the medieval age as a time of specialization of the supernatural over the scientific. Baring-Gould believed that any age propelled itself in reaction to the excesses of the one before, and it is in this way that he understood the French Revolution. He saw the Revolution as a push away from the medieval towards noble ideals, and he saw in the Revolution’s philosophical and practical excesses a specialization of its ideals against ideals that came before.

Baring-Gould understood the progressive religious movements of his own day as empowered by the same modern impulse against the past as the French Revolution. He saw these religious movements as having admirable goals, and yet also having excesses of specialization resulting in hasty negations and schisms. As I discussed in the first chapter, disturbances from the Victorian “revolutions” suggested by *On the Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews* were still very much in the British cultural atmosphere when Baring-Gould was constructing his own *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* (1869-70). *Origin* partially assumes the modern stance and schemas of these controversial works. These schemas are then joined within a central device of the Hegelian dialectic and generally tempered by a Tractarian appreciation for orthodoxy, tradition, and the mystical religious experience.

In *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, Baring-Gould was not arguing against these controversial texts, but against the “excessive” materialism that might result from them, and the “excessive,” *negating* conservative retort. He censured those who might respond to the controversy by rejecting science in place of religion, or vice-versa. In Baring-Gould’s philosophy the material and spiritual are dialectically opposed and can, with effort, be conciliated. Baring-Gould was interested in formulating a Catholic answer to the controversies of his day by suggesting a Catholic *via media*, or Hegelian synthesis of the old (which he associated with tradition, the Oxford Movement, and Roman Catholicism) and the new (which he associated with Protestantism and modern philosophies). The synthesis would require joining within a unity the positive assertions of each side of the conflict. For Baring-Gould, progress involved a thesis responded to by the progress of a newer antithesis, and then an even truer progress of a synthesis of the two.

Baring-Gould’s attitude towards competing philosophies resembles Walpole’s attitude towards competing literary styles in which the “excesses” of the unrealistic medieval Romance was replaced by the “excesses” of the restrictive modern novel. Like Walpole, Baring-Gould desired to find a proper balance.

The Third Novel

Baring-Gould’s earliest two novels—the first set in the England of his own time, depicting class tension and a difficult marriage of opposites, the second depicting the religious tumult of the French Revolution—prepared the way for his

third novel, *Mehalah*. *Mehalah* takes up its predecessors' consideration of the conflict over new and old ways of thinking. Furthermore, *Mehalah* draws the divergences of these novels together by combining the subjects of an incongruous courtship and religious passion, and furthermore combining their settings by depicting rural England at the time of the French Revolution.

Both *Through Flood and Flame* and *Mehalah* draw from Baring-Gould's courtship by featuring an older, wealthy man falling in love with a younger, lower-class, outstanding woman in a rural setting—though in *Mehalah* the pursuit takes on a Gothic, darker form, depicted as frightening, antagonistic, and undesired (I should mention that *Through Flood and Flame* has a frightening, disfigured character who has affection for the female protagonist, though this is not the novel's central relationship). Grace, a young woman with brown hair, brown eyes, and a red handkerchief, stood out to Baring-Gould as desirably exceptional, and these physical characteristics and distinctiveness are mirrored in the heroines of *Through Flood and Flame* and *Mehalah*.

In Exitu Israel was published in the same year as the first volume of *Origin*; these two contemplate many of the same ideas and were both influences on *Mehalah*. (Following *In Exitu*, *Mehalah* restarted Baring-Gould's novel-writing after almost a decade of remission, probably because for much of that time he was occupied with the writing of *The Lives of the Saints*.) The events of *Mehalah* and *In Exitu Israel* take place around the same time. *Mehalah* is set between 1793 and 1799, and *In Exitu Israel* is set more specifically in the years 1788 and 1789.

Baring-Gould's interest in the iconic French Revolution was superseded by an even greater interest in the lesser-known cultures and histories of rural England, including the Essex marshland. Similar to *In Exitu* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, though more subtly, *Mehalah* connects the time of the Revolution with concerns of Baring-Gould's day. *Mehalah* is set in the time of the Revolution in rural Essex, an area of seeming insignificance, with the Revolution on its periphery. In this way the novel provides an off-center consideration of the French Revolution, which gives the subject new vigor, unmistakably connects revolutionary events with England, and appeals to Baring-Gould and his readers' interest in local color.

Baring-Gould makes economic use of materials from the time period, adorning *Mehalah* in the style of revolutionaries and their goddess Liberty, establishing Elijah as a chief smuggler circumventing the increasing naval presence, and removing George temporarily from the plot by means of a press-gang forcibly recruiting for the French Wars. Yet the detailed historical and philosophical rendering of the French Revolution found in *In Exitu Israel* almost guarantees that any novel set by Baring-Gould in that time will make more than cursory use of its materials. *In Exitu Israel* provides a literary precedent in Baring-Gould's fiction of a conflation of the issues of his day and those of the French Revolution. Concerning *Mehalah*, Fowles states that:

There is a thin pretence that it is a historical novel, taking place soon after the French Revolution. *Mehalah* herself wears the *bonnet rouge*; the smugglers and the pressgang are still active. But everything else in the book is of the 1870s. (*Mehalah* xi)

While I strongly disagree with the suggestion that *Mehalah*'s historical elements are merely a "thin pretence," I would nonetheless agree that the book is "of the 1870s."

Mehalah serves as a bridge between the 1870s and the French Revolution through its Essex coastline setting, geographically among the closest in England to revolutionary activity and French interaction (largely via smugglers), and with a strong French cultural and hereditary influence. In fact, the War Office of 1797 considered a spot a few miles east of Mersea Island to be the most likely entry point of a French invasion.¹⁴

Further bridging the 1790s and the 1870s, Baring-Gould saw the Mersea region in his day as anachronistic, an untouched corner of England seemingly cut off from modern developments. Some things had changed since the time of the Revolution, like a diminution of the smuggling trade, but much seemed stuck in the past. The place was to Baring-Gould a bridge through time, so that *Mehalah*'s plight could have been of the 1880s as much as of the 1790s. In this way Mersea could readily connect French-Revolution-era Britain with Victorian Britain.

In the French Revolution, the spirit of youth revolted in pursuit of liberty against aged institutions and conventions. Young, aspiring, idealistic *Mehalah*, wearing the *bonnet rouge* of the revolutionaries, is the "spirit of youth" rebelling against the older, oppressive villain Elijah. While she is unclear on the details of her freedom, some kind of progressive "spirit" is certainly animating her. This spirit is especially apparent when contrasted with the Gothic villain Elijah, associated as he and his Gothic home are with the past and the restrictiveness of a predetermined fate.

¹⁴ Harry Carmichael describes the presumed point of invasion in an essay included in the Ordnance Map reprint "Foulness and Mersea, 1904": "Sandy beaches, a rarity in Essex, were backed by low cliffs which began just south of Clacton. In 1797 the War Office considered this the most likely landing point of the French invaded Britain. Shore batteries were constructed supported by mounted artillery and a large garrison stationed inland to avoid the malarial fevers of the coast." In this essay Carmichael also quotes part of the opening setting description of *Mehalah*. (*Old Ordnance Survey Maps*. England & Wales Sheets 242 & 259. Alan Godfrey Maps, 2002.) Mersea Island is about five miles west of Clacton.

In the novel's first scene Elijah declares a feudal conception of his role as landlord—including ownership of his tenants—that Mehalah rejects vehemently, declaring herself free. Throughout the novel she questions his authority and refutes his determination of her fate and purpose. Mehalah, with her “spirit of youth,” fights for her freedom against the dominating influence of Elijah and the general antiquity he embodies.

Baring-Gould's interest in properly navigating within the contrary currents of the ancient and the modern is revealed in his earlier novels, as well as in the preface to *The Lives of the Saints* and in the purpose behind that series.

Elijah's association with the past and Mehalah's association with the modern might also be associations with the spirit of religion and the spirit of science, respectively. Recall Mehalah's empirical investigation of Elijah's supernatural tale of Grimshoe. Mehalah's freedom would then include the freedom of inquiry, unrestrained by authoritarianism, while Elijah's appropriately prophetic talk of fate and destiny would be the cosmic assumptions of religion. It is of interest that Mehalah is not a particularly religious character (besides her pursuit of a vague Ideal and her idealization of George), and her religious instruction appears to come solely from Elijah.

Any modern elements found in provincial Mersea are expectedly subtle. Nonetheless, *Mehalah* does contain modern elements distinctly opposed to ancient or medieval elements. Many of these modern details are provided by the novel's occasional references to the French Revolution. Furthermore, though the novel doesn't directly reference Darwin or *Essays and Reviews*, it does contain a few

culturally relevant statements about the Bible and its authority, mostly spoken by Elijah: “I’ve heard say that in the Bible it is spoken that there’ll be an end of this world. I could have known that without the Bible” (*Mehalah* 173). This declaration is a reminder of the “internal Revelation” principle of *Origin*. Among other statements relatable to the Bible and the religious controversies is a rural, “antiquated” take on the subject:

“I heard a preacher once take as his text,” said he [Elijah], “Our God is a consuming fire; and he told all in the chapel that this was writ in Scripture and therefore must be true to the letter, for God wrote it Himself, and He knew what He was better than any man.” (269)

Disparaging depictions of the “light,” modern side of the threshold can be found in George and Phoebe. Contrasted with the dark-haired Elijah and Mehalah, these blonde, flippant characters seem less rural and immersed in the past—and less immersed in the gravity of the novel. In certain instances George is made to be particularly modern. He reveals one association with the modernity in his gift of the “Liberty” illustration to Mehalah. Furthermore, George displays what Baring-Gould would consider a dismissive modern cynicism towards the supernatural when Mehalah gives him her family’s magical medallion and explains its magical properties:

“It had been in the gipsy family of my grandmother time out of mind, and was lent about when any of the men went on dangerous missions. No one who wears it can die a sudden death from violence—that is”—Mehalah qualified the assertion, “on land.”

“It does not preserve one on the water then?” said George, with an incredulous laugh.

“I won’t say that. It surely did so to-night. It saves from shot and stab.”

“Not from drowning?”

“I think not.”

“I must get a child’s caul, and then I shall be immortal.”

“Don’t joke, George,” said Mehalah gravely. “What I say is true.” (*Mehalah* 33)

Following this conversation, Mehalah and George hear “plaintive whistles, loud, high up, inexpressibly weird and sad.” Mehalah is awed by the sound, claiming that it is the supernatural sound of “the Seven Whistlers,” who mean “death or deathlike woe” (*Mehalah* 34). George maintains that they have simply heard the long-beaked curlew. Because of the ominous warning, Mehalah entreats George never to remove the charmed medallion:

“For God’s sake, George”—she threw her arms round him—“swear, swear to me, never to lay aside the medal I have given you, but to wear it night and day.”

“There! Glory, I swear it.”

But George does not really believe, and, when he is taken by the press-gang, he gives the medallion to Elijah as a message to Mehalah, which allows Elijah to trick her into thinking that George is dead and that his ghost has visited to return the gift. In believing that George’s ghost has visited her, Mehalah has erred in presuming a supernatural explanation; nonetheless George’s flippantly modern attitude is presented as particularly objectionable.

Towards the end of the novel, George returns from his supposed death with an even more pronounced cynicism and sense of superiority. He is now the smugly rational and world-weary young soldier found elsewhere in Baring-Gould’s fiction—a type obviously much disliked by the author (see, for instance, the protagonist’s brother in Baring-Gould’s novel *Red Spider* [1887]¹⁵). As expressed in the introduction to *The Lives of the Saints*, Baring-Gould disliked the modern tendency to reject the supernatural wholesale. He did not take every belief in the supernatural as truth, but he was in part a mystic and had an open mind towards the possibilities of supernatural activity.

¹⁵ *Red Spider, Temple Bar, Serialized*, Vol. 79, pp. 131-160 (Jan 1887), etc [published the same year in 2 vols., London: Chatto & Windus].

George is situated further onto the side of modernity and rationality in his contrast with Elijah. Unlike George, Elijah very much believes in the reality of the supernatural, ghosts, fate, etc.

Modernity and progressiveness find their most positive form in the vague aspirations of Mehalah towards freedom. Though Mehalah embodies the spirit of youth in her battle with Elijah, she, as the central character of the novel and a threshold character, is also positioned within the opposition between old and new. She stands between the two men courting her in this respect, deciding between old, “restrictive” Elijah and young, “freeing” George. While Mehalah loves George completely, she cannot deny a connection with Elijah, along with a fascination and respect for him. Also, Mehalah’s ideals about freedom—associated with modern George—are matched by the complete belief in the supernatural she shares with Elijah.

Because she believes George to be dead, and to protect her self-respect in Red Hall, Mehalah marries Elijah, in name only, with nothing else altered in their relationship. George returns to discover this shocking change.

Expectedly, George wants Mehalah to sever herself from the “tyranny” (293) of this marriage and the ugly past—her time at the Gothic Red Hall with Elijah—but she finds this proposition difficult:

“My Glory! how delightful it would be to cast all the horrible past away like a bad dream ; all the past from when I was pressed into the service, to now—to drop it all out of memory as though it never had been, and to take up the story of life from that interruption.”

“Oh, George!” She trembled and gave one great sob, that shook her.

“How we should live to one another, live in one another, and love one another! Why, Glory! we should not care for any others to come and disturb us, we should be so happy—” (294)

George suggests possibilities of escape; for instance, they might move far away from Mersea, to somewhere like Plymouth Harbour, and marry. Plymouth and its history

were well known to Baring-Gould, lying but twenty-five miles south of his manor home. As a bustling city and port it was a strong counterpart to provincial Mersea. George argues to Mehalah that, “nobody there would know you, whence you came, and what your history. They would not care to ask. That would be a new life, and in it all the past would be forgotten” (294-5).

Mehalah is tortured by these suggestions; she wants to be with George, but she also feels what she calls a “duty” to Elijah (*Mehalah* 295)—chiefly because she has accidentally blinded him with a vial of vitriol in one of their struggles.

She had rendered him in a moment helpless as a babe, and dependent on herself for everything. She must attend to his every want, and manage the farm and his business for him. By a stroke, their relative positions were reversed. The wedding night had produced a revolution in their places of which she could not have dreamed. She felt at once the burden of the responsibilities that came upon her. She was called upon by those on the farm to order and provide for everything connected with it. She had to think for the farm, and think for the master into whose position she had forced her way. (*Mehalah* 255-6)

By the time of George’s return, Mehalah has also received that novelistic mainstay, an inheritance, making her financially independent. She could now easily succeed in the intention of her earlier “revolt” and escape Elijah. Before, “feudal” Elijah wielded so much power; now, after this “revolution in their places,” he is blinded and reliant on her. Perhaps the decline of Elijah is in part a picture of the waning of the old ways as a result of the consistently increasing influence of modernity.

After wanting and striving to be free and bemoaning her restraints, Mehalah’s own nature restrains her; as she tells George: “There is something in here, in my bosom, I know not what it is, but it will not let me [leave Elijah]. If I were to go against that I should never be at ease” (298). Modern-minded George calls Mehalah’s sense of duty to Elijah (and to the past) a “silly sentiment” (*Mehalah* 299). His attitude recalls the Revolutionary “excesses,” described by Baring-Gould as the

complete rejection of the past. Related to the temptation presented by Phoebe on the *Pandora*, George is arguing for Mehalah to negate the past and what it seems to require of her.

Here at the end of the novel George is fulfilling his previously defined role as a facilitator towards freedom. As she earlier desired, he offers to help Mehalah in escaping Mersea—a provincial, backwards, stagnant, and difficult place. Mehalah now, however, after all that she has been through, is unable to allow him that role. She feels that something would be incomplete in this abandonment of the past—that she would be miserable because for her the past could not be forgotten.

This penultimate chapter of the novel, “Temptation,” firmly connects freedom with modernity and restriction with the past. During her conversation with George, Mehalah once again stands on the sea-wall; behind her is the feudal, restrictive Gothic “castle,” and before her the expansive freedom of modernity and mobility. A Gothic “curse,” caused by her past action, binds Mehalah to the castle and prevents her unhindered passage into modernity. Mehalah tells George that she must remain in her threshold position between the two opposite cousins, taking care of Elijah while drawing strength from her friendship with him:

All I want is to live on here in my sorrow and difficulties, and just now and then to see you and talk to you, and thus to get refreshed and go back to my duties again with a lighter heart, and strengthened to bear my burden. (*Mehalah* 295)

Mehalah is unable to escape towards freedom with “modern” George because she is deeply connected to Elijah and the “past.” She thus feels the tension related to her painful internal contradiction of spirit and flesh that she feels throughout the novel. The French Revolution stood in the background of Victorian culture and

debates as a convenient point for considering the persisting conflicts and tensions between the old and new.¹⁶ *Mehalah* takes place on this threshold point, channeling resonances between the French Revolution and Victorian era and joining their analogous revolutions of modern thought against the *ancien régime*.

De Profundis, In Profundum

Returning to my earlier discussion, I will take a look at the most dramatic of Mehalah's threshold experiences, which follows her failed "revolt" on Valentine's Day against the "old order" of Elijah. In this part of the novel one can see clearly see the ambivalence of Mehalah's threshold position.

Mehalah's failure sends her into a state of hopelessness in which she bitterly recalls George's gift to her of the picture of Liberty wearing the *bonnet rouge*. Looking through a window of Red Hall towards the Ray, she sees a star shining. At this point she still believes that her idealized, "modern" George, who was to provide her access to true freedom, is dead (though he could not provide her such access and he is not dead). Mehalah connects George and the sublime star as transcendent and out of reach: "She drew herself up on her knees, and strained her united fingers, with the palms outward, towards that glittering star, and moaned, 'My Valentine! My George, my George!'" (201).

The title of this chapter, "De Profundis," ("Out of the depths") is the traditional Latin title for Psalm 130, one of the seven "penitential psalms":

1 Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

¹⁶ Consider how the American Revolution served as a threshold point between old and new in nineteenth-century American literature. Two better-known that blatantly use the American Revolution in this way are Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" and Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*.

2Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
 3If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
 4But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
 5I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
 6My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. [...] (KJV)

Mehalah cries “out of the depths” in a desperate prayer to her ideal George—her idol and embodiment of perfection. The “depths” from whence Mehalah sends her prayer is the restrictive situation engineered by Elijah, represented in his Red Hall, and made nightmarish in Grimshoe.

In her prayerful posture, Mehalah experiences keenly the extreme contradiction of her “indefinite,” threshold self: “She a goddess! She who was now so weak. Her power was gone. Liberty! She had none. She was a slave.” (201). In a sense, Mehalah experiences this contradiction through the multiple layered settings of the novel: the memory of the Ray with which she associates happiness and freedom, the current captivity in Red Hall which she seeks to escape, and Grimshoe, the fearful picture of never-ending stagnant restriction.

Defeated, Mehalah can only cry out—yet, shockingly, there is a response:

Suddenly, as if in answer to that wail from her wounded heart, there came a crash and then loud, pealing, agonising, a cry from below out of the depths, and yet in the air about—“Glory! Glory! Glory!” (201)\

The unexpected response to her cry for freedom emerges not from above—not from the star to which she prays—but from below, “out of the depths” of the dungeon of Red Hall. The answer, she discovers, comes from Elijah’s mad brother, who has broken through his bottom-floor window, his “bleached, ghostly hands” reaching through the opening. Elijah arrives to explain that, in his lonely obsessing over Mehalah, he has trained his brother to cry “Glory!” for his food. Elijah goes on to

explain that he forgot to feed the brother because he was distracted by Mehalah's escape attempt, and the full moon causes the brother to go madder (a parallel with the battle of Grimshoe).

The explanation for the answered prayer is anticlimactically non-spiritual (another oblique, "material" answer, like the burning house discovered at the anticipated climax of the Grimshoe investigation), nonetheless Mehalah finds significance in the fact that the madman responds to her cry for freedom; she insists to Elijah that there is meaning in his answering: "I take his cry as an appeal to me, and I will protect him from your brutality" (204). Elijah is annoyed by her siding with his brother, calling her a "perverse creature" (202). When Elijah makes to whip his brother, Mehalah grabs the whip and breaks it. Mehalah then asks to care for and pity the brother, but Elijah will not allow it. He says that she should care for and pity *him*. This is an interesting response considering that the brothers are in many ways presented as two sides of a single being. Mehalah's desire to help this mad brother perhaps reveals a connection with Elijah (or at least the "free" side of him). The "restrictive" Elijah, however, is unwilling to allow this arrangement.

As the French Revolution provided the British with an external, yet fairly immediate version of their own pursuit of progress, Mehalah sees the Rebow brothers' relationship as a picture of both her desire for freedom and her subjugation:

"I should pity him," said the girl. "He and I are both wretched, both your victims, both prisoners, wearing your chains."

"You have no chains round you, Glory."

"Have I not? I have, invisible, may be, but firmer, colder, more given to rust into and rub the flesh than those carried by that poor captive. I have tried to break away, but I cannot. You draw me back." (203)

During the conversation concerning Elijah's dependent brother, the subject of Mehalah's own dependent relative appropriately arises. Elijah enchains Mehalah through her mother, and Mehalah articulates the fact:

"I submit now, but only for my mother's sake. Were she not dependent wholly on me, were she dead, I would defy you and be free, free as the gull yonder."

Elijah put his hand inside his door, drew out his gun, and in a moment the gull was seen to fall.

"She is not dead," said Mehalah, with a gleam of triumph in her sad face.

"No, but winged. The wretch will flutter along disabled. She will try to rise, and each effort will give her mortal agony, and grind the splintered bones together and make the blood bleed away. She will skim a little while above the water, but at length will fall into the waves and be washed ashore dead."

"Yes," said Mehalah; "you will not kill, but wound—wound to the quick."

"That is about it, Glory!" (203)

Mehalah, the mad brother, and the dying gull, are all foiled by Elijah in their escape from Red Hall; and they are all featured in the next scene, which, as I will explain, is a curious inversion of Mehalah's previous crying "out of the depths."

Late that evening, when everyone else is asleep, Mehalah again looks out her window, this time discovering the wounded gull.

The miserable creature was struggling with a broken wing, and with distilling blood, to escape to sea, to die, and drop into the dark, tossing, foaming waves, to lose itself in infinity. It could not expire on the land, it must seek its native element, the untamed, unconfined sea; it could not give forth its soul on the trampled, reclaimed, hedged-in earth.

Was it not so with Glory? Could her free soul rest where she now was? Could it endure for ever this tyranny of confinement within impalpable walls? She who had lived, free as a bird, to be blown here and there by every impulse, when every impulse was fresh and pure as the unpolluted breath of God that rushes over the ocean. Was she not wounded by the same hand that had brought down the white mew? (207)

As with Elijah's brother, Mehalah identifies with the bird in a way of understanding herself and her desire for the sea. She is soon distracted from her thoughts by the discovery that the madman has escaped and is leaping towards the sea-wall, with her as the only witness. She decides against alerting Elijah as she again identifies with the brother's desire for escape.

Let the poor creature taste of liberty, inhale the fresh, pure air, caper and race about under no canopy but that of God's making. She would not curtail his time of freedom by an hour. [...] She rouse Rebow! She reconsign the maniac to his dark dungeon, with its dank floor and stifling atmosphere! (208)

The narration unites the gull, the madman, and Mehalah as overlapping variations of the same striving for freedom:

The gull was forgotten now; its little strivings overlooked in anxiety for the mightier strivings of the human sufferer. Yet all these three were bound together by a common tie! Each was straining for the infinite, and for escape from thralldom; one with a broken wing, one with a broken brain, one with a broken heart. There was the wounded bird flapping and edging its way outwards to the salt sea. There was the dazed brain driving the wretched man in mad gambols along the wall to the open water. There was the bruised soul of the miserable girl yearning for something, she knew not what, wide, deep, eternal, unlimited, as the all-embracing ocean. In that the bird, the man, the maid sought freedom, rest, recovery. (208-9)

Here the text explicitly unites the desire for escape with the desire for the infinite. It also suggests that this desire is an instinctual, gradual, and difficult struggle, as Baring-Gould suggests of the general development of individuals, religions, and societies in *Origin*, including those of his own day.

Mehalah decides that she will watch over the brother and keep him from harm, so she quietly exits the building and follows after him. On the way she picks up the dying gull, and its draining blood flows on her, "like glue" (209). She watches the madman, sitting on the sea-wall, work at his chain and rejoice when he is free of it—a reminder of Mehalah's attempts to work out her restriction on the same point. The man, looking "always forwards and upwards" (210) does not realize that he is watched by Mehalah. In an incident recalling Mehalah's frantic quest to Grimshoe, the madman is frightened by his own shadow:

...he cowered back from it, jabbering, and putting his hands supplicatingly towards it; then he slipped down the bank, laughed, and ran across the marsh, with his shadow behind him, and thought in his bewildered brain that he had cunningly eluded and escaped the figure that stood before him to stop him. (210)

The madman then boards Elijah's white duck punt, which, with its white, muffled oars, fittingly resembles the gull. Before Mehalah can react he rows "out towards the open, towards the unbounded horizon." He rows only a short distance standing up; he is seemingly unable to "face the land, the place of long confinement, he must turn and look out to sea."

Later in the story, Elijah informs Mehalah (and the reader) that before the escape incident, his actual mad brother had died, and that he had trapped George in his place. This treatment, Elijah says, drove George mad. Elijah's shocking declaration draws a connection between George and the mad brother as both are associated by her with freedom. Elijah is lying to Mehalah about this cruel act, but the idea of the connection remains, as the lie retroactively reconfigures the madman's escape as George's escape.

While watching the madman disappear into the horizon, Mehalah stands on her threshold point of the sea-wall dividing land and sea. She also stands, as if to reinforce her threshold position, at a significant, transitional threshold in time: "The tide had turned. It flowed at midnight, and midnight was just past" (210). This time-threshold brings to mind the story's setting at the close of the eighteenth century. The sea-wall functions as a threshold of time between symbols of the past and the modern—Red Hall and the ocean.

In her distraction Mehalah releases the bird, which flutters into the water.

Mehalah watched motionless, with a yearning in her heart that she could not understand, her arms extended towards that boundless expanse towards which the man and the bird were being borne, and into which they were fading. He was singing! Some old, childish lay of days that were happy, before the shadow fell.

There stood Glory, looking, indistinctly longing, till her eyes were filled with tears. She looked on through the watery veil, but saw nothing. When she wiped it away she saw nothing. She watched till the day broke, but she saw nothing more. (210-11)

As usual, Mehalah does not understand her feelings; she longs “indistinctly.” Nonetheless the escape of the brother provides for her a stirring picture of escape towards the horizon. Through the spiritual language used, invoking the “wide, deep, eternal, unlimited,” we can see that this escape is more than a mere escape from Elijah; it simultaneously resonates with Mehalah’s spiritual growth. The madman’s actions resemble, in an exaggerated form, some earlier actions of Mehalah: he is frightened by his shadow (and then laughs); he gazes upon the sea and is drawn to the horizon; he returns inwardly to times before his misfortune. Thus Mehalah is able to see her own “self” through this figure. Yet this figure is an ideal, disconnected self in the sense that it is accomplishing, in metaphorically significant action, that which she cannot: escape into the infinite. It is appropriate that this pseudo-George becomes an external ideal for Mehalah.

Mehalah once again feels that strain associated with the sublime between what she is and her ideal potential. Mehalah’s own dependent still enchains her, but Elijah’s dependent, with whom Mehalah has identified, is now “free.” Mehalah is drawn to the sublime image of the infinite, even long after the brother fades away. Later the punt is found washed on shore and it is speculated that the brother drowned, but this is never confirmed, and so a picture of him in continuous movement towards the horizon remains.

The “De Profundis” chapter ends with Mehalah hearing the mad brother’s cry of “Glory!” in answer to her prayer. The following chapter, “In Profundum,” ends with the previously described scene of Mehalah at the sea-wall. So we are given, for contrast, “Out of the Depths” and “Into the Depths.” In the former case “depths”

seems to refer to the low place of Psalm 130—low in relation to the sublime infinite and freedom to which the prayer is sent; it is a place of restricted helplessness and discontent from which to call out for salvation. In the latter chapter, “depths” takes on a very different meaning, referring to the immense sea so prominently featured. In this case we are made to reconsider the word *profundum* in one of its literal meanings as “the depths of the sea.”

Thus *profundum* takes on a double and paradoxical set of meanings, both as the lowest pit of restriction and as the depths of the infinite sea, which for Mehalah symbolizes unlimited freedom opposed to the “depths” of restriction.

The poetic possibilities contained within the term *de profundis* attracted Baring-Gould, along with other writers of his time.¹⁷ I will now discuss two poems with that title published within a year of *Mehalah*.

“De Profundis” by Christina Rossetti was published in 1881, a year after *Mehalah*.¹⁸ Like Baring-Gould, the devout Rossetti was part of the Oxford Movement (and, unlike that of Baring-Gould, her work is recognized as in this category). Rossetti’s poem depicts a dynamic strikingly similar to Mehalah’s desperate straining towards the transcendent star and the horizon:

Oh why is heaven built so far,
 Oh why is earth set so remote?
 I cannot reach the nearest star
 That hangs afloat.

I would not care to reach the moon,
 One round monotonous of change;
 Yet even she repeats her tune
 Beyond my range.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) wrote a poem entitled “De Profundis” in 1840 on the death of her brother. It was published posthumously in 1862. Thomas Hardy’s “De Profundis” (published under this title in 1901 in *Poems of the Past and Present*) was in later publications renamed “In Tenebris” (“In/Into the Darkness”).

¹⁸ “De Profundis,” *A Pageant and Other Poems*, Boston: Robert Brothers, 1881.

I never watch the scatter'd fire
 Of stars, or sun's far-trailing train,
 But all my heart is one desire,
 And all in vain:

For I am bound with fleshly bands,
 Joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope;
 I strain my heart, I stretch my hands,
 And catch at hope.¹⁹

Perhaps *Mehalah* was an influence on this poem (though any influence would not have been facilitated by the Anglo-Catholic connection, since, as I have discussed, the novel gave no apparent hint of this influence.) Much of the imagery in the two texts seems related; for instance, the moon as “[o]ne round monotonous of change” brings to mind the repetitious light of the light-house which is associated with the supernatural yet monotonous Grimshoe.

Rossetti's poem, like *Mehalah*, describes the anguish of contradiction within the self: the heart which desires to ascend is “bound with fleshly bands.” The narrator strains between the opposing elements of the given self and a desired state of self located in some desired transcendent realm.

Alfred Tennyson wrote his poem “De Profundis” on the birth of his son Hallam in 1852. This work was eventually published in May of 1880, the same year as *Mehalah*.²⁰ The writing and the eventual publication of this poem each fall on opposite sides of the controversy over *On the Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews*. Tennyson had been affected by pre-Darwinian speculation over the vast age of the Earth and its development, such as that found in Lyell's *Principles of Geology*

¹⁹ From Rossetti's *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881).

²⁰ Tennyson's “De Profundis” was first published in the monthly literary magazine *Nineteenth Century* (vol. 7, no. 39, May 1880) and the next month in *Littell's Living Age* (vol. 145, issue 1877), which comprised material from various magazines and newspapers. Furthermore, it was published in book form the same year in Tennyson's *Ballads and Other Poems*.

(first published in three volumes, 1830-3).²¹ Lyell's work suggests the possibility of an alternative to the traditional Christian understanding of the world. Tennyson's poem contains references to scientific speculation on the vastness of time and space, connecting this concept with the more intimate consideration of his new son's emergence into the world.

The poem's conception of the "deep" is scientifically informed while also being traditionally religious. The first part of the poem is titled "The Two Greetings," and the first greeting describes what could be interpreted as a scientific and secular view of the deep, without mention of God:

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Where all that was to be, in all that was
Whirl'd for a million æons thro' the vast
Waste dawn of multitudinous-eddy light— [...] (1-4)

The second greeting, in contrast, introduces the "Spirit of God" moving "as he will" (28) over this "waste dawn" of the deep, as in Genesis 1:2: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (KJV). Thus the poem retains the Genesis account while introducing concepts of recent scientific discoveries and speculation—working between the two, and fusing them into the unity of the poem.

These "Two Greetings" are addressed to Tennyson's newborn child, and the poem considers this child's development in this "double" and contradictory reality:

O dear Spirit half-lost
In thine own shadow and this fleshly sign
That thou art thou—who wailest being born
And banish'd into mystery, and the pain
Of this divisible-indivisible world
Among the numerable-innumerable
Sun, sun, and sun, thro' finite-infinite space
In finite-infinite time— (39-46)

²¹ *Principles of Geology*, 7th ed., London: J. Murray, 1847 [1830-3].

The newborn's "Spirit" is "half-lost" in its own individualizing physicality, born into the mystery and painful difficulty of a contradictory, dialectical world—"divisible-indivisible," "numerable-innumerable," and "finite-infinite."

Tennyson evokes a similar image to Mehalah's mediation on the sea-wall:

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
From that true world within the world we see,
Whereof our world is but the hounding shore— (29-31)

Likewise, Mehalah's development is directed towards her pursuit of the transcendent "deep" amidst the two ambivalent "worlds" of her paradoxical setting.

Tennyson's poem ends with a consideration of its subject's development in relation to the transcendent:

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee;
We feel we are something—that also has come from Thee;
We are nothing, O Thou—but thou wilt help us to be.
Hallowéd be Thy name—Halleluia! (62-5)

This closing encapsulates the poem's sensation of continual motion: the newborn emerges out of the deep and into constant development—from "nothing" to "something" to what "thou wilt help us to be." Like Mehalah, the newborn experiences a simultaneous movement out of the deep and into the deep: "out of the deep" to "that last deep where we and thou are still" (25), a "becoming" between absolutes.

Tennyson's newborn must progress through a contradictory world and self—seeming particularly contradictory in the midst of Victorian controversies. Like Baring-Gould, Tennyson gave much thought to the controversies caused by the conflict of past and modern ways of thinking—including the scientific and the religious—and, like Baring-Gould, he sought to work through the resultant

contradictions in his writing. Tennyson's newborn emerges from the mystery of creation, and this mystery involves the Victorian controversies over human origins and biblical texts, as addressed implicitly in the poem.

Like Tennyson, Rossetti references the vastness of physical space, and, by association, the vastness of time. Perhaps Rossetti's poem is also in part a response to the Victorian controversies between science and religion; its narrator is trapped, cut off from the profound vastness of the spiritual by the profound vastness of the physical.

These are some possible indications as to why there was a significant Victorian consideration of the evocative phrase "*de profundis*," a desperate "crying out from the depths." The rural, untaught Mehalah emerges from the confusing "depths" of her surroundings in pursuit of some vague ideal, and, in her rural "naivety," she is, like Tennyson's newborn, an all the more accommodating representative of an individual awash in the confusing existential contradictions presented by the advance of modernity in Victorian culture. Mehalah's cry out of the depths and longing for the depths might then represent the bewildered Victorian reaching for the spiritual "depths" from the "depths" of the physical world, described by recent scientific study as vast in space and time. The awe-inspiring profundities of the physical and spiritual worlds—overlapped with competing philosophies and interpretations of the ancient and the modern—were mysteries affecting ideas of progress and development of the self and of society. Mehalah's spiritual searching is a picture of "progress," not in its more optimistic depiction as proclaimed alongside

such events as the Great Exhibition of 1851, but from a related yet darker perspective shaped by confusion and painful contradiction.

The Overlie of Opposites

Both of the “De Profundis” poems and *Mehalah* seem to address the idea of progress amidst the contradictions of modernity. *Mehalah*’s fear related to progress is stagnation, the loss of development as depicted in the endless repetition of Grimshoe. She fears being trapped in the “depths,” and also being cut off from the “depths.” The paradoxical term “depths” can be related to the contradiction of her threshold being.

The double meaning of *profundum* is yet another example of how a subject in *Mehalah* becomes ambivalent in relation to the heroine’s subjective perspective on the threshold. Though the *profundum* ambivalence is not actually revealed to *Mehalah*—existing in chapter names, outside of the textual body—still, its paradox describes the complexity of her perceptual experience. Like the Mersea setting, Grimshoe, the locked door on the Ray, and *Mehalah* herself, this single idea *profundum* is made to necessarily consist of two antithetical elements. In a related manner to these others, the *profundum* paradox suggests that both freedom and restriction are “the depths” and, furthermore, that a movement out of the depths is also a movement into the depths. This paradoxical movement complicates *Mehalah*’s considerations of progress.

The *profundum* paradox in *Mehalah*, with its paradoxical rendering of progress into modernity, is related to a paradox in the British discourse responding to

the French Revolution. During the Revolution, British conservatives forced the philosophical debate towards the topic of what type of liberty is *true* liberty, that is, what type of liberty will lead to sustained or increasing liberty, and what type of *apparent* liberty will lead to violent disorder and eventual tyranny and restriction; furthermore, what restrictions are necessary to maintain freedom? Edmund Burke established this type of paradoxical questioning early on in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).²² As Gregory Claeys explains:

From virtually the outset the *Reflections* argues that France in the hands of the revolutionaries was analogous to a madman or highwayman, lacking in government and possessing 'liberty' only in the wild and anarchic sense of the having power in the state of nature. (14)²³

Furthermore, Burke describes the Revolution's "liberty" as threatening "a new form of tyranny" (Claeys 13). Burke's essay drew progressive responses to his paradoxical definition of liberty from Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790), Thomas Paine in *Rights of Man* (1791), and James Mackintosh in *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791). These responses offered alternate definitions of Burke's terms, and these terms were made increasingly more "paradoxical" in the opposed and contradictory responses that followed Burke.

As the French Revolution progressed, conservatives found much to support their cautiousness over supposed "liberty" (alongside related concepts such as "progress"). Particularly throughout the early nineteenth century, the specter of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror remained as a reference for the debate on democratization, ensuring a continual discussion of freedom as paradoxical.

²² *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L.G. Mitchell, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999 [1790].

²³ Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Legislative disputes following the beginning of the Revolution were exchanged over terms of maintaining a sustainable society—a society without the sudden and violent upheaval of the French. In accordance with the philosophical questions, political questions were argued regarding *who* benefits from what freedoms, and what sort of timeframe for democratization should be followed. The British parliamentary attempt to balance restriction and freedom was, as in *Mehalah*, concurrently an attempt to balance the old and the modern, the modern associated with greater freedom, and the old associated with less. A depiction of a national “*via media*” between these extremes can be found in a conservative illustration (later sold as an engraving) called “Britannia between Scylla & Charybdis. Or—The Vessel of the Constitution steered clear of the Rock of Democracy, and the Whirlpool of Arbitrary-Power” (published by H. Humphrey in 1793). In this illustration, William Pitt the Younger is depicted as safely steering the boat of the Constitution, carrying Britannia, towards the “Haven of Public Happiness,” between the rock of democracy, crowned with a *bonnet rouge*, and the whirlpool of arbitrary power, a swirling mass of monarchical faces. This is but one conceptualization of Britain’s “measured” progress, but it indicates how the old system of absolute monarchy and the modern system of democracy were at times considered opposed extremes on the path to progress—the same conceptualization employed in *Mehalah*.

The depiction of a “threshold” perspective amidst extremes is common in Gothic literature: the dangerously “free,” riotous mob of modernity is set alongside the oppressive, restrictive aristocratic orders returning from the feudal past. The terrifying populist Gothic mob drew inspiration from depictions of mobs of the

French Revolution, such as in the storming of the Bastille and in the Reign of Terror. Lewis's novel *The Monk* (1796), written not long after the Terror, contains an example of a populist mob violently defying the *ancien régime* of the aristocracy and the Roman Catholic Church; the novel also includes as its title character a frightful Gothic figure of the *ancien régime*. The downtrodden, repressed mad brother in *Mehalah* is another possible example of the "Gothicization" of the liberated lower-classes, while his opposite and "double" Elijah is drawn from the frighteningly feudal "aristocrat" of the Gothic tradition. Terrors on the Gothic threshold regularly emerge from both sides of an opposition.

As I have discussed earlier, Baring-Gould was very interested in the paradoxical question of religious and political freedom in relation to the modern and the medieval. He writes that the absence of God in the National Assembly's "Rights of Man" revealed the paradoxical possibilities of freedom and revolution: "Robespierre, Danton, and his clique made force supreme—as supreme as in the days of Monarchy, and trampled on the rights, to protect which they had been raised into power" (*In Exitu* xi). Baring-Gould's account describes the ambivalent confluence of monarchy with its overturning.

In *Origin* Baring-Gould spends a great deal of time discussing revolutionary ideas concerning rights and progress, at one point even describing Christianity as a revolutionary movement resulting in a "social revolution" based on equality, all being "one in Christ Jesus" (Part 2, 204). Progress was an important theological concept to Baring-Gould, as reflected in his hymns such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers" (1865)

and his translation of the hymn “Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow” (1867).²⁴ His conclusion in the *Origin* chapter “The Basis of Right” is that sustainable rights must be based on a dogma—namely, that God created man for a “determined end [...], the perfect development of his faculties” (Part II, 204). For Baring-Gould, rights must be based on this progress of the self, which involves duty to God and to fellow man.

Progress in this conception involves a duty to respond simultaneously to the two opposite movements of thesis and antithesis, the restriction of the older and the freedom of the newer. Duty is a free choice of self-restriction, a synthesis of thesis and antithesis, for the purpose of greater freedom.

Mehalah’s theme of freedom and restriction is a participation in the Victorian debate over the definition of liberty and progress. The chief difficulty for its heroine is how to attain a true, progressive, lasting freedom that can somehow escape the seemingly relentless reversal into restriction. The novel’s theme of freedom set against restriction is at the core of its string of paradoxical items (the locked door, the restrictive villain as freeing hero, the unfettered hero as restrictive villain, antinomy of freedom and restriction within a unity, etc), and this theme reaches its highest development in the relationship of Mehalah and Elijah. The question of “true” freedom and “true” progress, of which Elijah and Mehalah have very different conceptions, is contested in their verbal battles. The duty that Mehalah feels for the “past” and Elijah corresponds to Baring-Gould’s Tractarian understanding of the duty required for true freedom. The central paradox of the novel has an external form in

²⁴ “Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow,” translated from B.S. Ingemann’s “Igjenem Nat Og Trængsel.”

the relationship of Elijah and Mehalah and an internal form in the internal contradiction of Mehalah. Her personal quest for progress is involved in the Victorian philosophical, political, and religious pursuits of progress.

I have discussed the proposition that Mehalah and Elijah each function as an “indefinite” or threshold self—a Hegelian consciousness—operating within a shared yet internal contradiction. For both Mehalah and Elijah this threshold self is made apparent largely in their relationship to a dependent. Furthermore, there is significance in their relationship with each other’s dependent. Mehalah is the only witness of the mad brother’s exit towards the horizon. Conversely, Elijah is the only witness of Mrs. Sharland’s later exit in death:

“She is dead,” said Elijah [to Mehalah]. “I knew it. I heard her feebly cry for you, an hour ago, and I crept upstairs, and I listened by her bed, and held my hand to her heart till it ceased.” (*Mehalah* 303)

As I have described, Mehalah identifies with Elijah’s brother. Elijah does not identify with Mrs. Sharland, but she is categorized with him because she is completely under his control and readily usable for his schemes for controlling Mehalah. Mrs. Sharland praises the “master” for his wealth, delights in the comforts of Red Hall, and rebukes Mehalah for rebuffing Elijah’s advances.

Interestingly, the dependents exhibit an *excess* of their respective side of the threshold. The mad brother resembles depictions in nineteenth-century texts and illustrations of the excessive “freedom” of violent mobs of the French Revolution. The brother is animal-like in his wild and senseless freedom. Mehalah’s mother conversely resembles the picture of the docile, contented type completely dominated by the feudal interests that the Revolution aimed to overthrow. In this resemblance

they are representatives of the land and sea people of Mersea and the opening setting, connecting the novel's basic structure with the question of freedom and progress.

The threshold selves of Elijah and Mehalah overlap and conflict at the point where they connect with each other's dependent. Thus Mehalah's desire for freedom and Elijah's desire to restrict, meet and overlap in each character's "dependent" side, so that Elijah's attempt to control Mehalah is also an attempt to control his brother *and* a corresponding part of his self, and Mehalah's attempt to escape restriction is also an attempt to escape her mother *and* a corresponding part of her own self. The internal contradiction of Mehalah's is made most apparent as a result of her struggles with Elijah. The impulses of Elijah and Mehalah can be seen as a single, shared paradox—like the battle of the Grimshoe twins—in which they press away from the tendency of the dependent other (and into conflict with one another) as mirror images. As seen in their association with Grimshoe (and the Rebow brothers' "battle" in Red Hall), Mehalah and Elijah are "twins," and "doubles," and thus freedom and restriction are shown to be twins—in Baring-Gould's Hegelian terms, a single idea in itself and out of itself, in which each side is defined only within their opposition.

Mehalah contains numerous and significant overlapping incidences of the Gothic *double* or *doppelgänger* trope, in which an individual has a counterpart who is strangely opposite, often evil, and yet ultimately the same person. I would argue that the *doppelgänger* in *Mehalah*, and in other Gothic works of the time (featured most famously, and around the same time as *Mehalah*, in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* [1886])²⁵ is used to represent difficulties in reconciling contradictory

²⁵ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, ed. Martin A. Danahay, Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1999 [1886].

elements of the individual and society, such as the ancient and modern, and freedom and restriction. Mehalah's threshold and "doubled" nature corresponds with the complication of her development and advancement.

The French Revolution increased the distinction of modern from medieval by advancing modern thought in Europe and further establishing the *idea* of modernity as, for example, scientific, secular, and democratic. Clarification of the idea of modernity also clarified the idea of the medieval and the past. Philp suggests that "events in France provided a central background condition for the confrontation in Britain in the 1790s especially, between the defenders of the status quo and a popular, extra-parliamentary movement for political (and, occasionally, social) reform" (9). Claeys argues that "the spectrum of reinterpreting French events" solidified "into that basic, if complex and frequently shifting, set of positions, from 'right' to 'left', which has dominated subsequent modern politics" (3).

This spectrum of reinterpretation, driven strongly by Burke's response and positioned within terms of the ancient and the modern, polarized British public opinion beginning in 1790 (Claeys 10). Gothic fiction responded to this polarization and its resultant tensions with an outpouring of Gothic novels—Gothic readers and writers abounded. Commentators of the 1790s like the Marquis de Sade argued that the shock of the Revolution propelled the genre of Gothic fiction.²⁶ Yet the Revolution did not merely enrich Gothic fiction by providing the shock of extreme change and the Terror, but, perhaps even more importantly, by the shock of clearly defining modernity set against the medieval. In the Revolution the modern was

²⁶ As described in the preface of his *Reflections on the Novel* (1800). Collected In *Marquis de Sade: The 120 Days in Sodom and Other Writings*, Tr. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver, New York: Grove Press, 1966 [1881].

opposed to the *ancien régime*—that is, engaged in *literal* battle with it. Nonetheless, the Revolution not only clarified these elements, but, as I have argued above, the terms of its opposition were placed within the ambivalence of a paradoxical debate. In this way the effects of the Revolution correspond with and were channeled through the Gothic threshold's simultaneous contrast and merging of the ancient and modern, as figured bodily in the *doppelgänger*.

With *Mehalah*, Baring-Gould not only returned to the prototypical Gothic plot, but also to that historical event that raised the production and consumption of Gothic novels to an extraordinary level, all while clarifying and complicating the Gothic conflict. In the next section of this chapter I will continue my study of the context of *Mehalah* by considering how *Mehalah* joined the Gothic tradition by way of *Wuthering Heights*, a novel which also addresses the ambivalence of progress central to *Mehalah*.

Chapter Two

Mehalah in Context, Part II: *Wuthering Heights*

A later work of singular and admirable power, in which the freshness of humour is as real and vital as the fervour of passion, was at once on its appearance compared with Emily Brontë's now famous story. And certainly not without good cause; for in point of local colour *Mehalah* is, as far as I know, the one other book which can bear and may challenge the comparison. (A.C. Swinburne, "Emily Brontë," *Miscellanies*, 1886; originally printed in the *Athanaeum*, 16 June 1883).

In his review of Mary Robinson's *Emily Brontë*, Algernon Swinburne gives *Mehalah* bold praise, stating that it resembles *Wuthering Heights* (1847)¹ in some of the Brontë novel's more salient traits: humor, passion, and the use of local color.² This is high praise from Swinburne, considering his unbridled admiration for *Wuthering Heights*, of which he says that "those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose" ("Emily Brontë" 207).

The flattering comparison concludes, however, with an equal measure of qualification. Swinburne goes on to state that the abruptness of *Mehalah*'s tragic ending mars the unity of the work. The chain of inevitability is an irreplaceable virtue, he says—"the one quality which justifies and ennobles all admissible horror in fiction" (202)—and an unbroken atmosphere maintained throughout a work requires that any horror be a continuous part of the whole. The tragic moment, developing from all that comes before and leading to all that follows, must, he states, seem inevitable. Though *Mehalah*'s tragic ending *could* realistically happen, Swinburne argues, the tragedy does not seem as if it *must* happen. In contrast, says Swinburne, the tragedy of *Wuthering Heights* is properly incorporated within a framework of

¹ *Wuthering Heights*, Linda H. Peterson, ed., Boston: Bedford Books, 1992 [1847].

² "Emily Brontë," *Swinburne as Critic*, Clyde K. Hyder, ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

inevitability, as are the tragic moments of other famed works: *King Lear*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

For Swinburne, inevitability is a crowning jewel, “the one final and irreplaceable requisite of inner harmony,” and the inevitability of tragedy is a type of the general artistic inevitability which Swinburne describes in an earlier, related essay “The Brontës” (1877).³ In this essay he speaks of the Brontë sisters and their

power to make us feel in every nerve, at every step forward which our imagination is compelled to take under the guidance of another’s, and thus and not otherwise, but in all things altogether even as we are told and shown, it was and it must have been with the human figures set before us in their action and their suffering; that thus and not otherwise they absolutely must and would have felt and thought and spoken under the proposed conditions.” (188-9).

At the highest order in Swinburne’s hierarchy is the writer who never gives his reader the opportunity or will to revolt, but rather forces him to acquiesce in the power of indisputable story-telling. The conclusion of *Mehalah*, it seems, was designed particularly to cause the reader to “revolt,” but I will speak of this more in the next chapter.

Despite his tempered praise of *Mehalah*, Swinburne was forced to further explain his comparison of it with *Wuthering Heights*. In a letter written a few days after the publication of his “Emily Brontë” essay, Swinburne responds in dramatic defense to concerns raised by John Nichol: “I did not mean—Heaven forbid!—to set *Mehalah* on the whole, beside or near *Wuthering Heights*: but it is the only book I know which shows anything of the same power” (Lang, v, 27).⁴ Even while thus critically distancing the two works, Swinburne maintains, though with more care, that *Mehalah* is unique in sharing a particular “power” with the Brontë novel.

³ “The Brontës,” *Swinburne as Critic*, Clyde K. Hyder, ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

⁴ Cecil Lang, ed, *The Yale Edition of the Swinburne Letters; In Six Volumes*, by Algernon Charles Swinburne, New Haven: Yale UP, 1962.

A footnote of Hyder's in *Swinburne as Critic* mentions this response to Nichol along with a slight change between the 1883 and 1886 versions of the essay.⁵ In *Miscellanies*, Swinburne removed the sentence, "And the humour [of *Mehalah*] is even better; and the passion is not less genuine." By connecting Swinburne's defensive response to Nichols and the subsequent change of the essay, Hyder implies that the edit resulted from either a diminution of Swinburne's esteem or as a concession to those like Nichol. Another possible reason is that the awkward sentence basically repeats, though in stronger form, ideas appearing immediately before. Nonetheless, since the omission is the only significant change between the two versions, the implication that Swinburne reassessed his praise of *Mehalah* remains.

Yet, in a letter written two days earlier than the one to Nichol, Swinburne corresponds with a fellow admirer of *Mehalah*, Henry Arthur Bright, in a tone of unrestrained praise:

Your approval of my few and feeble words on Emily Brontë gives me real pleasure; and not least is that part of your letter which assures me that we are of one mind about *Mehalah*. Your experience of other people's opinions as to that remarkable book is quite the reverse of mine: for I have found it admired and accepted in quarters where (for one reason or another, good or bad) I expected to find no such appreciation. Ladies, as far as I have seen, enjoy it more than men do. If it is really written by a man—Mr. Baring-Gould or any other—I must give up all claim to discernment of sex in literature. A lady who read it at the same time as I did, and with whom I compared notes as soon as we had finished, agreed with me that it must be the work of a woman: and my fellow-critic is one of the keenest and brightest intelligences I ever met in man or woman. To both of us the realism seemed as womanly in its careful—almost affectionate—particularity of detail and circumstance as did the tragedy in its headlong violence and excess. (Lang, v, 24-5)

Obviously, beyond the novel, Swinburne knew very little of Baring-Gould. (Also, perhaps "Sabine Baring-Gould" shared with "Ellis Bell" the ring of a pseudonym.)

At the time of this letter, Baring-Gould had not yet achieved his later more

⁵ *Swinburne as Critic*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 207.

pronounced reputation as a novelist and eccentric, though *Mehalah*, over a span of time, played a major part in boosting his celebrity. One should note that Baring-Gould, regardless of fame, was always at a remove from the centers of society, be they ecclesiastical, literary, or otherwise. Later interviews with the man would often mention the travel required to speak to him at his out-of-the-way, rural home. (By the time Swinburne republished his “Emily Brontë” essay in 1886, he probably would have discovered more about Baring-Gould.)

One must note how almost all of Swinburne’s comments to Bright about the mysterious Baring-Gould hinge on gender. Swinburne says that he alone, out of all his circle of undergraduates at Oxford, had detected the female hand behind *Adam*

Bede:

And I must say I should like to have distinct and positive evidence as to the authorship of *Mehalah*. I can hardly believe that a man—even a man of exceptionally feminine temperament and emotional genius—can have written the whole of that book: but if such a man has, he is one of the most singular creatures of genius on record. However, I do believe there is no such thing as certainty in such matters. (Lang, v, 25)

Swinburne goes on to say that his own work had, on one occasion, convinced a young mother that it had been written by a woman, a comment he took as flattering.

Stepping back from all of this confusion and contradiction, perhaps we see Swinburne in his writing on *Mehalah* as an “appreciator” rather than “critic” (as argued by Eliot in his essay “Imperfect Critics”), and thus an attempt to follow his praises and censures to some solid conclusion would be fruitless. When given the opportunity, he is able to pile a limitless amount of praise on Baring-Gould (“one of the most singular creatures of genius on record”); and when in “Emily Brontë” he does fault *Mehalah*, it is more for the purpose of lauding *Wuthering Heights* as a work “troubled and taintless, with little of rest in it, and nothing of reproach” (207).

Baring-Gould *does* deserve much admiration and consideration, and *Mehalah*, despite Nichol's objections, is worthy of being considered "beside or near" *Wuthering Heights*, being a related yet distinctly powerful work of the following generation. I want to explore in more detail the connections sensed by Swinburne, the "power" he felt them to share. Baring-Gould saw some power in a book written some thirty years before his own, something substantial, worthwhile, and affecting enough to warrant taking up and reworking. How does Baring-Gould rewrite *Wuthering Heights*—reorganizing material, creating a dialogue with it, struggling with it, establishing affinities, and making antithetical use of its material—to produce something new?

Wuthering Heights was published in 1847. The next year, Emily Brontë died at the age of thirty. At the time of her death Baring-Gould was fourteen years old, almost fifteen. Years of Baring-Gould's formative reading were during the time of the Brontë sisters' growth in popular and critical favor, as well as a time of growing interest in the remarkable details of their lives. As throughout his life, the young Baring-Gould was a vigorous reader with a penchant for provincial cultures and supernatural folklore. We would thus expect him to read the novels of the Brontë sisters, perhaps during his time of curacy in West Yorkshire, though more likely before. (At thirty, Baring-Gould was curate at Horbury Bridge, a scant twenty-odd miles from Haworth.⁶)

We find confirmation of this expectation in Baring-Gould's recently published diary. As evidenced by an entry of 12 December 1880, Baring-Gould read the novel with much enjoyment, and seems to have appreciated its comparison with *Mehalah*:

⁶ As I mentioned in the previous part of this chapter, Horbury was the site of the Luddite's most damaging attack—the total destruction of Foster's Mill in 1812. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) is set against the backdrop of the Luddite riots in Yorkshire of 1811-1812.

Received 2 great bundles of reviews of my “Mehalah” from the publisher, most say that it is clever, but repulsive, one says that it is a study of Ouida. I have never read a line of her’s. Another that the end is copied from Mr. Black. I have never read one of his novels. What is true is that there is a resemblance between Elijah Rebow and “Heathcliffe” [*sic*] in “Wuthering Heights”, but not intentional, though I have read Emily Brontë’s wonderful novel, which, by the by, I could not follow until I had drawn out the pedigree of the family of Heathcliffe’s Katie for constant reference. (Wawman 84)

For *Mehalah*, Baring-Gould not only took and reworked material from Emily Brontë, but from the larger Gothic tradition. Baring-Gould’s reworking of *Wuthering Heights* was a part of his taking and reworking material from a threshold tradition from which Brontë also drew. As part of the Gothic tradition, we can also assume that both works may deal with contradictory elements through their use of the Gothic threshold. As Swinburne says, some apparent points of similarity between the two works—and therefore likely found in their shared use of the Gothic threshold—are *passion*, *humor*, and *local color*—as well as perhaps some quality of *femininity*.

The *passion* of *Mehalah*, as in *Wuthering Heights*, is found in the female protagonist and the hero-villain. The aggressive passion on display in both novels can be understood as an outpouring of intense *dissatisfaction*. The passionate characters are unhappy, driven to attain something that is out of reach—often a loved one—or to escape some intolerable situation. Their dissatisfaction propels them into bursts of passion and wild action. Elijah desires Mehalah, while she desires both George and some kind of advancement out of the limitedness of her circumstances. In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff must have Catherine, and Catherine struggles amidst her competing love for Heathcliff and her desire for social and financial advancement.

Conversely, the *humor* of both novels is found in stagnant, undeveloping characters, such as Mrs. Sharland and Abraham in *Mehalah*, and of course Joseph in

Wuthering Heights. These characters are depicted as ridiculously self-satisfied or complacent. Joseph, for instance, is constantly complaining of others, but he is certainly content in his own lot and his standing as a “saint.” These characters are presented as foolish in their insular, inert personalities, and, in opposition to the passionate, dissatisfied characters, they are certainly indisposed to stretching across preset boundaries.

In this arrangement of passion opposed to humor, the passionate characters are dissatisfied with the “given,” a state which is humorously embodied by the self-satisfied characters. I believe this structure of passion against humorous complacency is in accord with an arc of development and advancement found in both novels. Concerning the qualities of *local color* and *femininity*, both novels feature as a central plot the story of a young woman growing up and developing on a Gothic threshold created out of a bifurcated rural setting.

Throughout this second part of Chapter Two I will briefly compare the arc of development in *Mehalah* and *Wuthering Heights*. The purpose of this comparison is to show how Baring-Gould’s use of the Gothic threshold is a direct engagement with a specific text in the Gothic tradition. As a continuation from the first part of this chapter, I will be discussing how the influence of *Wuthering Heights* assisted Baring-Gould in presenting his own ideas on ambivalent advancement in accordance with the British debates over the French Revolution. Appropriately, another similarity between the two novels is that the developments of their protagonists take place during the time of the Revolution. Like *Mehalah*, *Wuthering Heights* is set in rural

England and takes place around the same time, beginning in 1801 and recounting events from the 1770s up until that time.

A Threshold Setting

As in *Mehalah*, the opening, foundational chapters of *Wuthering Heights* firmly establish the novel's threshold setting. The bountiful and integral threshold imagery of *Wuthering Heights* has been discussed by scholars, most notably in Van Ghent's *The English Novel* and DeLamotte's *Perils of the Night*. *Wuthering Heights* has an overall threshold structure which resonates with the threshold imagery found throughout; this structure is formed by the binary opposition of the houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and the traveling and "commerce" between them. This threshold indicates both the connection and division between the houses. The houses, as they must, are contrasted in order to exist as distinct from one another, and connected in order to exist in the same reality. The reader quickly discovers how the houses are meaningfully situated in relation to each other, and the houses draw a number of dichotomies into their opposing definition. A chief dichotomy, that of the Gothic threshold, is the Grange as modern and civilized as opposed to the ancient and more "primitive" life at the Heights.

The sophisticated, modern Lockwood, as the new tenant of Thrushcross Grange, begins the novel by traveling between the two homes and across the threshold to the Heights and his landlord Heathcliff, who owns both houses. Lockwood's trek across the threshold is the first of the novel yet soon reveals a long

history of crossings between the two houses. Thematically his threshold crossings in the first three chapters set the stage for many more in the novel, past and future.

Because of his “reputation of deliberate heartlessness” (*Wuthering Heights* 27), Lockwood’s mother has bemoaned that he “should never have a comfortable home”; and we might wonder the same for Catherine, Heathcliff, and all of the characters who are compelled to cross borders from one home to another. Not only do Lockwood’s initial experiences in the novel establish the Gothic threshold setting, but they also involve the search for “home” within this setting. Lockwood is certainly one who is looking for himself via looking for a home, venturing into a very alien world and attempts to work out its mysteries—mysteries which intrude upon Lockwood and become for him very immediate and personal.

Lockwood’s pilgrimage across thresholds in the first three chapters preludes the pilgrimages of the novel’s two Catherines. Like Lockwood, both Catherine and her daughter are never comfortable at home (until the conclusion, perhaps). Both women are compelled to cross over the threshold from their respective homes, one beginning at the Grange, one at the Heights. For Lockwood and the Catherines, self-formation, home, and the threshold setting are tied together. Like Lockwood during his frightening night at the Heights, experiencing terrors alternately understood as natural and supernatural, both Catherines exist throughout much of their life on a confusing threshold between the opposite worlds of the Heights and the Grange.

When considering thresholds we are reminded of Lockwood and ghostly Catherine’s threshold struggle over the broken window—of the unbreakable and terrifying bond as he drags her little hand across the broken glass, but she will not let

go. They are certainly connected at this point as threshold crossers. The two main narrators of the story, Lockwood and Nelly, both operate as “threshold” characters, moving between and at times acting as a liaison between the two houses (and by relating the strange tale to the reader). Catherine is a waif when Lockwood reads of her and “meets” her, and we should consider how her story is a story about her growing “up,” the definition of “up” being in question throughout the novel because of the threshold setting.

As children, Catherine and Heathcliff wonder if life at Thrushcross Grange is the same as their world of ill-treatment at Wuthering Heights. Looking through the window, they see a lavish room in which the two “petted” Linton Children are fighting over a small dog.

When the two children are discovered, Catherine is injured and lives at the Grange for five weeks, becoming in the process a conflicted threshold creature. She still feels an attachment to her childhood and “primitive” Heathcliff, but she also now desires to fit into the more refined, “adult” world of the Lintons.

As Catherine approaches adulthood, the sides between which she carefully navigates become represented by a representative suitor. Edgar and Heathcliff, in a sense, represent for Catherine contradictory external parts of her internal self. She is able to maintain her double character rather easily when the two are apart, but to have them together with her at one time creates far too intense a contradiction of self; as Nelly recounts:

Mr. Edgar seldom mustered courage to visit Wuthering Heights openly. [...] I rather think his appearance there was distasteful to Catherine; she was not artful, never played the coquette, and had evidently an objection to her two friends meeting at all: for when Heathcliff expressed contempt of Linton, in his presence, she could not half coincide, as she did in his absence; and when Linton evinced disgust and antipathy to Heathcliff, she dared not treat his

sentiments with indifference, as if depreciation of her playmate were of scarcely any consequence to her. (*Wuthering Heights* 75)

Either side is contemptible by the standards of the other, and so Catherine cultivates a contradictory sense of what is worthy and what is despicable.

Nonetheless, Heathcliff at this point in the novel is certainly pictured as degraded in relation to Edgar. One day, by Catherine's miscalculation, a dreaded meeting of the two suitors almost occurs. An agitated Heathcliff departs just as Edgar enters, creating a visual threshold for Catherine, as Nelly relates to Lockwood:

Doubtless Cathy marked the difference between her friends as one came in, and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect – He had a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do, that's less gruff than we talk here and softer. (*Wuthering Heights* 77)

We are placed, along with Nelly, Lockwood, and Cathy, on a threshold between the two. In this particular contrast between an educated, wealthy, civilized young man and an uneducated, poor, rural one, the country side of the equation is certainly found wanting. Heathcliff has been pressed by Hindley to devolve into a stereotypically low country fellow.

Baring-Gould was likely more assured in his writing of a divided threshold setting having read *Wuthering Heights*. *Mehalah*, like *Wuthering Heights*, establishes its vital threshold setting from the beginning. Rather than using the heights and valleys of the Yorkshire moors, on which the Heights sits above and the Grange below, Baring-Gould constructed his threshold setting out of the feuding water and land of the Essex marshlands. Indeed, as *Wuthering Heights* begins with Lockwood's visit to the Heights, *Mehalah* begins with Elijah's "cross-threshold" visit from the

reclaimed land of Red hall to the un-reclaimed Ray, but in this case the “feudal” landlord is visiting the “modern” tenant.

As I have discussed, *Mehalah*’s setting is not, as in *Wuthering Heights*, so obviously divided between the modern and the Gothic, though the modern and Gothic aspects of the threshold setting are eventually delineated. In *Wuthering Heights* the Lintons are blonde-haired in comparison with dark-haired Catherine and Heathcliff; in *Mehalah* we find blonde George and Phoebe. Baring-Gould’s use of the blonde-haired characters as relatively “modern” was likely influenced by *Wuthering Heights* (in accordance with a tradition of associating hair with certain traits *and* the light/dark categorization of the Gothic tradition).

As I have explained in the first chapter, *Mehalah* is a threshold character like the two Catherinees. She also has a representative suitor from each side of the threshold, and her choice of suitor is integrally related to her passage into adulthood and self-development. *Mehalah*, however, does not feel compelled to cross a threshold as she grows up; rather, she is forced on a threshold position by the manipulative Elijah. From this threshold point *Mehalah* watches the horizon, the symbol of her expansive freedom, and desires not to reconcile the two sides, but to escape from the land via the water and horizon.

Double Movement over the Threshold

In *Wuthering Heights*, when an indecisive Catherine feels pressed to choose between her two suitors, she tries to place Nelly in her threshold position:

To-day, Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him, and I’ve given him an answer – Now, before I tell you whether it was consent or denial – you tell me which it ought to have been. (*Wuthering Heights* 83)

Nelly, annoyed by Catherine's self-centeredness, is disinclined to sympathize and give an answer. Catherine exclaims that she did accept the proposal, and asks if she made the right choice. Nelly suggests that, to marry Edgar, Catherine must lose Heathcliff. Catherine does not accept this necessity, and responds passionately:

Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff. Oh, that's not what I intend – that's not what I mean! I shouldn't be Mrs. Linton were such a price demanded! He'll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime. Edgar must shake off his antipathy, and tolerate him, at least. He will when he learns my true feelings towards him. Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch, but did it ever strike you that, if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power. (*Wuthering Heights* 87)

Catherine believes that she can use Edgar's wealth and power to lift Heathcliff up, while in marrying Heathcliff she would degrade them both. In advancing herself she would advance him.

Nelly considers this to be a very poor reason for marriage—she tells Catherine, “you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying” (*Wuthering Heights* 87)—and later events prove that young Catherine is being naïve indeed. Catherine's threshold struggle continues for the rest of her life, centered in her position between Edgar and Heathcliff, and the tension eventually drives her to madness and death, at which point her daughter is born.

This second Catherine's statement to Nelly that she will love none other than her papa is so naïve as to guarantee the opposite: she surely *must* and *should* find a lover as she transitions into adulthood.

Like her mother, the second Catherine develops a threshold self; throughout her secret courtship, she attempts to balance both the affection for her father and the affection for Linton, attending to her father, and then sneaking out to Wuthering

Heights. These late night rendezvous are a danger to her father and do in fact eventually age him and threaten his life. Catherine is torn between the two loves—her childhood love for her father and her more “adult” love. She attempts to balance them, causing incredible tension to herself and those around her. Both her father and Linton end up dead, seemingly racing each other to the grave.

As Heathcliff says when he finally traps Catherine, she chose to “cross the threshold” into the Heights because of her affection for Linton Heathcliff: “You cannot deny that you entered my house of your own accord” (*Wuthering Heights* 236).

Together, the naiveties of each Catherine frame a contradictory “wisdom” between them: the first Cathy is naïve in thinking she can balance a relationship with her husband and a relationship with the man she loves; the second Cathy is naïve in thinking she need not reach out to any other beyond her immediate situation for love. They are naïve in opposite ways: the first naively inclusive and the second naively insular. The implied contradictory wisdom then seems to be that one should somehow be insular and inclusive simultaneously. Both Catherine’s are eventually compelled to bridge opposite worlds in the action which is so central to the novel: the bridging of home and the home of another.

Heathcliff orchestrates young Catherine’s temptation to the “other side,” recreating not only the earlier generation’s love triangle—in the interrelationships of Hareton (as Heathcliff), Linton (as Edgar), and Cathy (as her mother)—but also Cathy’s temptation, like her mother’s, to the suitor on the “other side” of the threshold with the resulting destructive tension. The difference is that each Catherine

is moving from an opposite direction, from an opposite side of the threshold to the other. The first Catherine's childhood love is Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights; she is tempted by Edgar and Thrushcross Grange. The latter Cathy's childhood love is the same Edgar and his Grange, and she is drawn to Linton Heathcliff and the Heights, with Linton acting as a puppet controlled by his father Heathcliff. So the competing "loves" on each side of the threshold, Edgar and Heathcliff, are remarkably consistent throughout the lives of both Catherine's.

Because of its consistency, this mirrored movement over the threshold could be seen as a single Cathy, existing across two selves, moving back and forth—beginning as the first Cathy at Wuthering Heights, being tempted by Thrushcross Grange, going there, desiring somehow to return to the Heights and her childhood, and dying. At this point she is reborn at the Grange (now tintured by Linton blood), and tempted by the Heights into returning there—returning to where she began (before in the conclusion returning with her Heights lover to the Grange).

In this sense a single Catherine begins life and a childhood on each side, and is tempted always to the other—ever restless, ever drawn by the other side—and once this process has occurred both ways, a conciliation of both worlds is allowed between Hareton and Catherine. This double movement reveals Catherine's threshold self, regardless of which side of the threshold she begins on. Both Catherine's desire to balance, reconcile, or unify the opposite worlds. These attempts maintain a central tension throughout the novel and supply its oft-scrutinized resolution.

By having a movement across the threshold from each side— from each of the opposite homes, during each Catherine's growth—we are given the suggestion that

crossing the threshold is necessary for growing up, or perhaps that growing up is essentially crossing a threshold, engaging with something “other” after the familiar world of childhood has been established.

The ambivalence of advancement in *Wuthering Heights* is further developed in its various competing depictions of heaven—the state of perfection, the culmination of growth and advancement. Lockwood speaks of a “misanthrope’s heaven” (*Wuthering Heights* 25); Heathcliff describes the Linton’s home as heaven and then condemns it, saying he prefers the “hell” of the Heights; Catherine creeps from the “heaven” of her childhood party with the Lintons, going *up* to the “hell” of the garret to be with Heathcliff; and Catherine states plainly that she dreamed that she does not belong in heaven nor would she happy to be there. The junior Catherine recounts to Nelly how she and Linton Heathcliff “were near quarreling” on the subject (*Wuthering Heights* 215).

No doubt a large part of the appeal of the Linton world for young Catherine is that everyone acts so “grown up.” She is a little lady in their presence, and she is admired for it. Nonetheless, the “grown-up” world of the Lintons is also, in relation to the world of *Wuthering Heights*, described as a world of children. Catherine makes it clear on several occasions that she thinks of the children as child-like. The world of her own childhood, *Wuthering Heights*, is described at these times as more mature and worldly (in strength, in toughness, in its connection with raw realities), even as the world of the Grange is more mature and worldly in a different sense (civilized, educated, open to the ways of the world—not provincially limited in

manner and knowledge). The ideal home, like the ideal heaven, is a source of disagreement in the novel.

So each side of the threshold contains a child-and-adult paradox in itself, which relates the houses and interweaves them. They are both childish and mature at different turns and in different ways. So to be childish and underdeveloped is the way of the Grange *and* the Heights, so is being mature and developed. Advancement, or growing up, is a movement towards and away from the realm of both. Degeneration is found in both realms; Linton Heathcliff seems to contain the opposite degenerations of weakness and savage bitterness in his pathetic being. Perhaps the second Catherine represents their united strengths; and perhaps this unity is further suggested by the closing relationship of Catherine and Hareton.

The double-movement plot of *Wuthering Heights*—describing the contrary developments of the two Catherines across the threshold—suggests the contradiction that growing “up” is a movement in opposite directions. The threshold tension of this contradiction is felt by the first Catherine, as she becomes two different people, alternately condemning either side in different company and struggling over which suitor to choose.

Wuthering Heights’s plot is a tracing out of the interrelationship within its threshold setting, once from each side to the other. The result is a overlapping of opposite plot arcs, each depicting a young woman’s development. *Mehalah* chronicles the life of but one young woman, yet we might ask if it contains anything relatable to this doubled tracing of a threshold setting.

As in *Wuthering Heights*, growing up in *Mehalah* is presented as ambivalent. I have described in earlier discussions how Mehalah encounters a sequence of paradoxes. I would argue that each paradox, as an idea tensely containing its own opposite, is a concentration of *Wuthering Heights*'s "double" movement. For instance, as Mehalah is attempting to find freedom at Red Hall, she encounters the *profundum* paradox in which a movement in either direction on the threshold takes her both in and out of "the depths." The Grimshoe battle contains a paradoxical structure through which Mehalah struggles to make sense of her strivings for freedom. Like the "double" plot of *Wuthering Heights*, these paradoxes confuse the concept of "progress."

When Mehalah eventually decides that she must stay at her threshold place between Red Hall and the sea (and between Elijah and George), she displays a naivety similar to that of the first Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* in that she desires to be married to Elijah while enjoying her old friendship with George—an arrangement both men find completely unacceptable. The naivety is joined with her naivety in exalting worthless George. As with the two Catherines, Mehalah's naivety is revealed in her attempts to respond, as a young woman developing into adulthood, to her threshold position between ancient and modern worlds.

Balancing the Threshold

Heathcliff runs away from the Heights after Catherine declares that a union with him would degrade her. At this point in the novel, when the threshold picture seems to equate progress with the Linton side, there is a break in Nelly's telling of the

story. The break occurs at Cathy's decision to marry Edgar—her determined crossing of the threshold—and marks the importance of the transition.

Nelly's tale begins again with the Linton siblings and Catherine—now Catherine Linton—having established a happy life, mostly because the Linton siblings indulge Catherine and make sure that she is never crossed. Nelly tells Lockwood,

for the space of half a year, the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand, because no fire came near to explode it. [...] I believe I may assert that [Catherine and Edgar] were really in possession of deep and growing happiness. (*Wuthering Heights* 95).

Catherine's threshold struggle would seem to have been settled. The Heights side is not mentioned, and Catherine only shows her Grange "side." But as Nelly states brusquely, "It ended."

Heathcliff returns, a wealthy and educated man. No one knows, nor is it ever revealed, how Heathcliff acquired his wealth or "raise[d] his mind from the savage ignorance into which it was sunk" (*Wuthering Heights* 94). Earlier, Heathcliff had seemed no match for Edgar, but now things are different. Whereas before Edgar had seemed the grown-up and superior one, now Heathcliff does. Unlike before, when Catherine avoided and dreaded the two's meeting, she now is happy to allow the contrast: "she sprang forward, took both [Heathcliff's] hands, and led him to Linton; and then she seized Linton's reluctant fingers and crushed them into his" (*Wuthering Heights* 98). She is excited by Heathcliff's development—thrilled by his unexpected return and this new threshold picture—and insensible to how this change may make her husband feel.

Heathcliff's return is like a return of the Gothic past—we might even say that it is precisely such a return. In the Linton household, the rational, civilized, and

controlled side of things seemed established; the dark past was but a memory. Yet somehow the past returns, impossibly revived. Brontë has strengthened Heathcliff and inserted him as a strange remnant of the “past” into the “modern” world of the Grange, as many other Gothic authors in the tradition have done with their creatures of the dark past.

This return, in which the past resurges in strength so that the earlier contest between rivals is resumed on more equal terms, firmly reestablishes a Gothic threshold. The threshold picture as described before the break in Nelly’s story, which placed Edgar comfortably in the lead, is replaced by an uncertain balance. The threshold scene is reestablished, and despite Catherine’s initial enthusiasm, the tense threshold struggle is reinitiated as well.

The Gothic threshold in *Wuthering Heights* is created by bringing back the bested past to contend with the modern, rational world—and making the past strong enough to do so. This threshold causes a complicated sort of advancement which stubbornly reverts back to the dark and primitive side. The path of advancement thus turns back to the threshold, as if requiring a reconsideration of the concept of progress.

As Baring-Gould mentions in his diary, Elijah is a character influenced by Heathcliff. They both pursue the one they love with savage, relentless, and unscrupulous passion. Like Heathcliff, Elijah is associated with the dark and primitive world. Also like Heathcliff, Elijah is instrumental in the novel in establishing a solid threshold experience for Mehalah—when all she desires is to escape the past and leave that threshold behind. Elijah very actively complicates

Mehalah's development and growing up by his "Gothic" influence, as when he creates a Gothic threshold by attaching her "modern" self with the ancient legend of Grimshoe.

Nonetheless, there are quite a few differences between Heathcliff and Elijah, and these differences are the points where Baring-Gould has resisted or altered the Brontë influence. While *Wuthering Heights* has petty Calvinists as its only explicitly religious characters (Joseph, Rev. Branderham, and his congregation), *Mehalah* has in Elijah an earnestly "religious" and "Calvinist" character of a very different type: powerful, passionate, and, like Heathcliff, attractive as a "dark" hero. Elijah is not a weak religious character, but a powerful, albeit dangerous one—and dangerous because of his religious beliefs. Elijah's restrictiveness surprises Mehalah when he describes it in exalted, cosmic terms.

In some ways Elijah is a merger of Joseph and Heathcliff, taking the intense religious devotion of the one and the intense passion for a woman of the other. Joseph speaks in grand terms, but his own person falls ridiculously short of them; Elijah's lofty words are matched by his intense passion and strength.

Unlike in *Wuthering Heights*, in which the modern side of the threshold is quite weak and generally unappealing in comparison to the other side, Baring-Gould creates what I see as a more "balanced" ambivalence in the threshold structure of *Mehalah*: the opposing sides are both strong because the "doubles," though resembling to Catherine and Heathcliff, are conversely from opposite sides of the threshold. The second Catherine and Hareton are associated with opposite sides of

the thresholds, but their relationship is overshadowed by that of the first Catherine and Heathcliff.

Developing from its focus on an opposed heroine and villain-hero, *Mehalah's* complex balancing of the threshold is mainly accomplished through the careful handling of Elijah. He is a paradoxical character, both repulsive and appealing, both a hero and a villain; the balanced ambivalence of the threshold is regulated by the interest and fear Elijah invokes in Mehalah.

At the center of Mehalah's paradoxical and ambivalent "double movement" on the threshold is her relationship with Elijah. Mehalah and Elijah pursue opposite "heavens," one of restriction and one of freedom (Elijah even uses the term "heaven" explicitly). Mehalah desires to advance into freedom through the modern, but Elijah works against that advancement. She is a threshold character, in transition, facing the modern, who desires to leave behind this threshold and her connection with the ancient world of Elijah. Elijah's manipulation causes her to remain at the threshold and thus experience a paradoxical or "double" growing-up. Mehalah's attempts at progress simply lead back to the threshold, until eventually she feels that she must remain there.

Interestingly, the ambivalence of this threshold position eventually begins to transform our perception of Elijah, creating the paradox of him as both hero and villain, and making Mehalah's relationship with him more ambivalent. As in *Wuthering Heights*, Mehalah's potential husbands are an integral part of the novel's Gothic threshold. Mehalah believes that marriage with George will solve for her the mysteries of her existence and allow her to progress, while Elijah conversely tells her

that marriage with him will provide progress for them both, while marriage with George would bring upon Mehalah “a curse”:

The sons of God must marry the daughters of God, and leave the animal men and women to pig together and breed listless, dull-eyed, muddle-headed, dough-hearted, scandal-mongering generations. The curse of God would have rested upon you if you had married George De Witt. I have saved you from that. (*Mehalah* 285)

Throughout the novel, we begin to realize that Elijah’s perception of George is correct, and we must consider if Elijah really might have “saved” Mehalah from him. Gothic fiction has always indicated a modern attraction to the medieval, and *Mehalah* gradually presents the ancient, Gothic side as empowered, desirous, and even necessary.

It does certainly seem that, on the novel’s Gothic threshold, progress is seen through a Janus-face, so that progress becomes a mirror image of regression, and that one must remain in some kind of entangled development involving the ancient and modern. The influence on *Mehalah* of the French Revolution and the Gothic tradition via the school of Emily Brontë meet most obviously in the ambivalence of progress facing the young protagonist.

As identified by Swinburne, perhaps the most surprising difference between *Wuthering Heights* and *Mehalah* is in their resolutions. *Wuthering Heights* ends with a fairly happy if debatable ending, while *Mehalah* ends with unmitigated tragedy (more akin to the ending of *Wuthering Heights*’ first half). In the next chapter I will conclude my discussion of *Mehalah* by considering the novel’s theme of marriage and how this theme develops gradually and strangely towards its tragic conclusion.

Chapter Three

The Botched Marriage Theme in *Mehalah*

“My good girl,” he whispered, “Botch it up. Marry. Most marriages hereabouts are botches” (*Mehalah* 189).

In this chapter I will discuss *Mehalah*’s marriage theme and how it relates to the novel’s tragic conclusion. I will begin by discussing Elijah’s “sermons” to *Mehalah*, in which he explains his understanding of why she should marry and love him. These sermons resemble Baring-Gould’s own sermons in both style and in their theme of the conciliation of opposites.

With *Mehalah* imprisoned at Red Hall, Elijah gains the opportunity to make her the audience for some strange, impassioned speeches. When *Mehalah* returns from her first futile meditation on the sea-wall, Elijah unleashes a chapter-long flurry of his thoughts at her.

“I heard a Baptist preacher say one day that God wrote a book, and then He created mankind to read it.¹ You are a book, and God made me to read you. I can do it. That wants no scholarship, it comes by nature to me. Others can’t. They might puzzle and rack their heads, they’d make nothing of you. But you are clear as light of day to me. You understand me?”

“I do not.”

“You *will* not. You set your obstinate, wicked mind against understanding me. I heard a preacher once say—I went to chapel along of my mother when I was a boy; I goes nowhere now but to the Ray after you—What is God? It is that as makes a man, and keeps him alive, and gives him hope of happiness, or plunges him in hell. Every man has his own God; for there is something different makes and mars each man. What do I want but you, Glory? It is you that can make and keep me alive, and you are my happiness or my hell.” (171-2)

Elsewhere in the novel we are allowed glimpses of *Mehalah*’s “religious” development; here we are given the picture of Elijah going to chapel as a young boy, soaking in religious teaching and then forming this early education into a demented

¹ Here Baring-Gould lightly mocks what he saw as the unbalanced Protestant regard for the Bible as the unmitigated center of the Christian faith.

yet passionately held theology which, it would seem, has become centered on his relationship with Mehalah. His speeches to Mehalah have the qualities of a sermon, and he describes his relationship with her in the terms of religion. (As I have discussed in previous chapters, the gravity and intensity of Elijah and Mehalah allows their relationship, on the Gothic threshold, to correspond with a wide range of events and ideas, such as the French Revolution and the Victorian religious controversies.) According to Elijah every individual follows a different path of spiritual development, and he believes that his path to spiritual development, involving his heaven or hell, is connected to Mehalah, and hers to him. Elijah's unique sense of morality is connected to this spiritual understanding: Mehalah is "wicked" when she resists him.

I would consider the relentless, hypnotic sermons of Elijah to be the most powerful part of *Mehalah*, and perhaps superior to anything similar—including the speeches by Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. The sermons emerge organically from the plot and are bolstered by their context. One can almost hear the crescendos of Elijah's strong yet straining voice as he attempts to relate his deeply held beliefs to Mehalah. Coming from the villain, the sermons have a frighteningly seductive charm—and a thrilling immediacy as Elijah stands before and at times actually takes hold of Mehalah.

Baring-Gould had been developing his sermon style for years before writing *Mehalah*. Baring-Gould's sermon collections published in the time leading up to the publication of *Mehalah* include *Village Conferences on the Creed* (1873), *Village Preaching for a Year* (1875), *The Mystery of Suffering* (1877), and *Sermons to*

Children (1879). Dickinson discusses Baring-Gould's development as a preacher in his biography:

Of Sabine's pastoral work in East Mersea we know very little. That it was not particularly successful is obvious from his references to it, for he returned to the subject more than once in his *Reminiscences*. [...] Yet it was during his sojourn in East Mersea that his powers as a preacher developed. Those were the days of hour-long, dreary sermons, but in preaching as in all else he was something of a rebel. He seldom preached for more than ten minutes, or at most a quarter of an hour, taking one point only and hammering it home with all the force of his nature. (73)

As I mentioned in the first chapter, many second-wave Tractarians dispersed to the countryside to apply their ideas. Unlike the more complicated prose of theological works such as *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, most of Baring-Gould's sermons were written for rural congregations. He did write some "intellectual" sermons, but these were not his common style.² He was keen to have his ideas understood by his generally uneducated congregations.

Though different in style from his more "high-brow" works, Baring-Gould's sermons present similar Anglo-Catholic ideas. *Village Conferences on the Creed*, for instance, contains a more conversational expression of an *Origin* concept: "Now people do not always believe quite right about things, but I do not think people generally can have had any strong belief, without there being some true ground for this belief" (7).³

Baring-Gould's sermons share with Elijah's a terse and even blunt conversational tone, "taking one point only and hammering it home with all the force of his nature." At times the resemblance thins, but a general likeness remains. Of

² For instance, *The Preacher's Pocket* (1880), as opposed to such sermon collections as those with "village" in the title, was written for exceptional members of a congregation, those "who in mental powers are above the ordinary level of his humble parishioners" (vii). To Elijah, Mehalah is likewise an exceptional spirit, worthy of his ideas and affection.

³ *Village Conferences on the Creed*, London: Joseph Masters, 1873.

course, one man wrote both, but the interest is in the transfer between genres. Baring-Gould's use of illustration is shared with Elijah, whose sermons unload a near-continual series of metaphors through which he attempts to convey his thoughts to Mehalah. Baring-Gould and Elijah's sermons share a characteristic "now then . . ." as they turn from illustration to conclusion.

For comparison with Elijah's sermons, consider the following excerpts from Baring-Gould's sermons, written in a "local color" style for his East Mersea congregation:

From this pulpit, I can see through the window a ship, a collier, if I am not mistaken, bound for Maldon. She has come from Newcastle, all her sails are spread, the wind is favourable, and she is cutting through the water, and will soon have doubled the point and entered the Blackwater. [...] Man is bound for the port of heaven, God's grace will not carry him there, unless he wills to go along with Grace. Man may will to reach heaven, but without grace he cannot get there. He lies becalmed.

[...]

Look at your watches. How delicate and intricate is the mechanism within [...]. Now the Church before Christ gave it life, was like the watch unwound, the Church after the giving of the Holy Ghost is like the watch wound up and set a-going.

[...]

On the road to Colchester is a windmill. You know it: when the wind blows, the grindstone turns, the clapper goes, and the wheat is ground into flour. [...] The wind won't grind corn without the windmill, and the windmill cannot grind the corn without the wind. The miller has provided all he can do and he looks to God to send him the wind. So with us. (*Village Conference on the Creed* 72, 118, 122)

Baring-Gould's church warden said that he "always had a story to tell towards the end of his sermon" (Purcell 135). His sermons returned the favor and got into his novel-writing as well. The quotation comes to mind:

'Are you' a lady is reported to have asked, upon being introduced 'the good Mr. Baring-Gould who writes such beautiful sermons, or the other Mr. Baring-Gould who writes novels?' (Purcell 2)

Here in *Mehalah*, Baring-Gould is writing both at once.

Even more striking than this stylistic resemblance is the fact that Elijah, in his fiery Calvinistic sermons, spouts concepts resembling the Anglo-Catholic Baring-

Gould's use of the dialectic. Other recognized novels of the Oxford Movement had extensive religious discussions, but not like these: dark sermons modeled after the Tractarian author's, unrestrained and poetic, spoken by the novel's villain.

Continuing his sermon to Mehalah, Elijah goes on to state, as he "heard a preacher say once,"

"God made every man of a lump of clay and a drop of spittle, and that He made always two at a time. He couldn't help it. He has two hands and ain't right and left handed as we, but works with both, and then He casts about the men He has made, anywhere. Hasn't He made all things double? Have not you two hands and two feet and two eyes? Is there not a sun and moon, are there not two poles to the earth, and two sexes, and day and night, and winter and summer? and"—he went up before Mehalah, and with a burst of passion—"and you and me?" (172)

Elijah recognizes a double-sided, paradoxical nature of things—"all things double"—a concept which resonates throughout the novel's narration. For Elijah, God is not right- or left-handed, but rather ambidextrous, creating with each hand balanced parts out of his unity, so that they are simultaneously distinct and unified (God does not *specialize*). Like Baring-Gould, Elijah takes this dialectical structure to be the explanation of the workings of all things. For instance, Elijah explains, a man who joins with someone who isn't his true double will not be happy. If he dies without his double he must wait until she dies and begins hunting after him as well. This need for a double, Elijah says in his theological musings,

is what makes ghosts to ramble. [...] But when they meet, that is heaven. And there is a hell too, but that isn't reserved for all, and it does not last for ever and ever, but is only when one has taken the wrong mate and has found it out.

Elijah expounds upon this idea of hell in such a way that connects it with Grimshoe.

"Glory!" he continued, "don't you see how the moon goes after the sun and cannot come to him? She is his proper mate and double, and the sun don't know, and won't have it, and so day and night, and winter and summer, and waxing and waning goes on and on. But that won't go on for ever. The sun will grow sad at heart, and wane for want of the moon some day, and then there will be a great flare and blaze and glory, and they will be in heaven. And now the two poles of the earth are apart, and so long as they keep apart, the world rolls on in misery and pain, and that is what makes earthquakes, and volcanoes, and great plagues—the

poles are apart which ought to be together. But they are drawing gradually nearer each other. The seasons now are not what they used to be, and that is it. The poles are not where they were, they are straining to meet. And some day they will run into one, and that will be the end. I've heard say that in the Bible it is spoken that there'll be an end of this world. I could have known that without the Bible. The poles must come together some day, and be one." (173)

Note that Elijah's heaven or "glory" is the explosive conciliation of opposites—an end to the Grimshoe fighting in which the repetitious "waxing and waning goes on and on" causing "misery and pain." At this moment of glory, antipodal twins ("the two poles of the earth") will cease resisting and become what they truly are, one.

Elijah's passionate words succeed, as they usually do, in engaging and disturbing Mehalah.

The terrible earnestness of the man imposed on Mehalah. He spoke what he believed. He gave utterance, in his rude fierce way, to what he felt. She, untaught, full of dim gropings after something higher, vaster, than the flat, narrow life she led, was startled.

'Heaven with you!' she cried, drawing back; 'never! never!' (174)

Both Elijah and Mehalah are presented as having developed an idiosyncratic and rough-hewn spirituality. Mehalah is taken aback by Elijah's extravagant talk of "something higher, vaster" proceeding jarringly from the mouth of the cruel, rude, dominating man she hates, because it uncomfortably resonates with her thirst for transcendence.

Though Mehalah finds the idea of heaven through union with Elijah unthinkable, in Elijah's philosophy (and, by the unavoidable association, Baring-Gould's), this type of conciliation, the marriage of opposites, is *the* answer to the Grimshoe predicament. I will discuss *how* conciliation might be supposed to "solve" Grimshoe shortly.

Elijah's sermons form a substantial part of the novel's second half. They consistently connect his dialectical philosophy with his desire for union with

Mehalah. These sermons are a prominent indication of a skewed presence of *Origin* philosophy in the novel. They suggest that Baring-Gould was aware—or at least at some point became aware—of the role his philosophy took in the shaping of *Mehalah*. Regardless, these weathered, countrified pieces of philosophy grant his novel a considerable depth of thought and feeling, drawing as they do from Baring-Gould's own passionately held beliefs.

The Botched Marriage

Marriage is a common enough theme for a novel, but *Mehalah* modifies this theme by connecting it with dialectic conciliation. A dialectic marriage is a marriage of opposites, and the marriage theme involves the joining of the novel's dichotomy of freedom and restriction.

Elijah's schemes are all directed towards drawing his opposite Mehalah into marriage with him—not just as a social act, but as a spiritual merging of selves. Mehalah is intent on choosing such a marriage for herself—and in her free act of choosing George she once anticipated a transcendent, spiritual freedom.

When all of the neighboring people of Red Hall are led to believe that Mehalah has become the mistress of Elijah, the spineless yet kind-hearted curate in Virley, Mr. Rabbit, suggests that she marry him to make things as right as possible:

“My good girl,” he whispered, “Botch it up. Marry. Most marriages hereabouts are botches” (*Mehalah* 189).

At which point he is dragged back into his house by his dictatorial wife:

“Marry!” was the pastor's last word, as he was drawn back by two soapy hands applied to his coat tails, and the door was slammed.

The theme of *Mehalah* is not just marriage, but the botched marriage. The pages of *Mehalah* contain not one happy, successful marriage—only various types of failures. Mehalah and George are the only pair who seem to have any hope of happiness, and the worth of George is questioned soon enough.

The botched-marriage theme begins with the novel's opening antagonistic "marriage" of the threshold setting. The theme is found in Mehalah's goal of marriage with George, which is foiled by Elijah, who then confronts her with his strange ideas concerning marriage, saying that he, as her double, will provide her with a *true* marriage. The theme is also found in the sub-plot of the unfortunate marriage of the Petticans. It culminates in Elijah and Mehalah's antagonistic marriage and their final dreadful "marriage" in death.

Mehalah is forced to marry the hated Elijah to preserve her reputation and protect her mother—truly a "botched" marriage. The marriage begins inauspiciously in a dilapidated church in Virley, attended by the offensive, unruly locals. Mehalah goes missing during the wedding feast. Upon return she is met by an irate Elijah who proceeds to chronicle all the misdeeds he has committed against her, culminating in a false confession that he had chained George up in his brother's place and drove him mad. As a fitting culmination of their wedding day, Elijah assaults Mehalah and she angrily smashes a container of vitriol on his face, blinding him. Altogether, the wedding day is just about as far from ideal as could be imagined.

The novel's depiction of Elijah as a villain is countered by an arc throughout the novel in which he is made to seem more and more like the proper match for Mehalah (a "double movement" as I discussed in the last chapter). These two

understandings of Elijah, as hero or villain, seem to battle throughout the novel.

Through a subtle, gradual process, Mehalah begins to sympathize more with Elijah and recognize him as a kindred soul, though she still will not love him.

This arc—"the poles drawing together," as Elijah would phrase it—is segmented by Elijah into distinctly defined stages as taken from Mehalah's wedding vow. During the marriage ceremony, Mehalah hesitates at the part of her vow where she is to say, "to love, cherish, and to obey" (240). She then will only say, "To obey." Elijah tells the parson to continue the service: "Let her obey now; the rest will come in due season." Indeed, some time after blinding Elijah, Mehalah eventually does say that she will cherish him.⁴ Elijah rejoices:

"Ha!" he shouted. "At the altar you refused to swear that. To love, cherish, and obey is what the parson tried to make you say; but all you swore to was to obey, you denied the other, and now you take oath to cherish. The Wheel of Fate is turning, and you will come in time to love where you began to obey and went on to cherish." (263)

As time passes, a remorseful Mehalah becomes amicable towards Elijah, and he responds in kind:

He had been accustomed to open hostility and undisguised antipathy. Now that he met with consideration and tenderness from her, he became docile, and a transformation began to be operated in his nature. Love him, she could not, but she felt that but for what he had done to George, she could regard him without repugnance. Pity might ripen into friendship. Into a deeper and more rich feeling it never could, for he had barred the way to this possibility by his dealing with De Witt. (266).

We are now told that Mehalah *could* have developed a "deeper and more rich feeling" beyond friendship for Elijah, which at the beginning of the novel seemed an impossibility. The novel's entrancing, grim tension is established in large part by the measured and delicately tentative *softening* of the novel's introductory antagonism—

⁴ Mehalah seems to be using "cherish" in the sense of "to care for devotedly." Elijah obviously takes it as some sort of intermediate state between "obeying" and "loving."

a softening occasionally rebuffed by resurgences of that antagonism, creating an evocative contrast between the two. By the end of the novel the reader has been led to consider Elijah, despite his faults, as preferable to George for Mehalah. The poles *do* seem to have moved closer together in invisible subtleness. This protracted form of marriage is another reminder of the extensive process of Hegelian conciliation described in *Origin*, not occurring in a single moment, but occurring over successive *moments*: to obey, to cherish, and to love.

At the wedding, Elijah had forgotten that he needed a wedding ring for Mehalah, so he gives her what he feels is an appropriate substitute, a broken link from the chain from which his mad brother escaped (implying that marriage with Elijah is imprisonment for Mehalah). The link is far too large for her to wear on her finger, so she wears it on a necklace. She tells Elijah that she keeps it with her, “because I took a solemn oath on that day, and I will not go from it” (268).

After Mehalah has taken her second oath to cherish, Elijah, a skilled blacksmith, decides that he will shape the link into a wearable ring. With Mehalah assisting him in his dark forge, Elijah gives another of his sermons, using the forge as his illustration. As he works the link on the fire he speaks of heaven and hell, and how his passions and Mehalah’s passions are eternal and will one day burn in the “very core of the fire in the heart of God” (*Mehalah* 270). Eternal hate, he argues, will result in hell, while eternal love from both will result in heaven: “if you love and I love, our love grows hotter and blazes and roars and spurts into one tongue, cloven like the tongues at Pentecost, twain yet one, and that is Heaven.” Again, Elijah

associates the state of their relationship with the eternal state of their souls, equating their union with heaven.

Elijah then asks Mehalah if she hates him, to which she hesitates in responding. She then says that her blinding of Elijah has canceled all his sins against her, but that she must hate him for what he did to George. Surprisingly, Elijah does not respond in his usual ferocity:

He stood trembling—a strange weakness came over him—he was not angry, savage, morose; he seemed a prey to fear and uncertainty.
 “Tell me, tell me truly. Glory! Does that alone prevent you from loving me? Had I never done what I said I had done, could you love me?” (271)

Here again is one of those strange moments, as during the scene with his mad brother, when Elijah becomes poignantly sympathetic. Mehalah responds:

“I do not say that,” she replied. “As I have told you before, I gave my heart once for all to George De Witt. I never could love you with my fresh full heart, as a woman should love her husband, but I feel that I could like you as a friend. I do pity you. God knows how bitterly I have suffered from remorse for what I did unwittingly, and how sincere I am in my repentance and desire to deal tenderly and truly by you, Elijah. I feel sometimes as if I could like you; I do acknowledge that you and I stand apart from others, and alone can understand each other; but then that great crime of your life against George rises up before me and drives back my rising compassion.” (271-2)

Mehalah had said before that she desired to pity Elijah’s mad brother (who she now believes to have been George). Now she pities Elijah. Her words of concession indicate for Elijah the drawing together of the poles. For him it seems the lie about George is a final barrier to be overcome. He trembles because of how near he feels to his singular goal, and the reader is made to feel anticipation as well.

Elijah meditates on Mehalah’s words as he continues molding the ring, and then he continues his sermon, again using the forge metaphor to describe the drawing together of him and Mehalah:

“Look here, Glory!” he said, “when iron is taken from the smelting furnace it is crystalline and brittle; there is no thread and texture in it, but we burn it and beat it, and as we work we beat our stubborn purpose into the metal, and it is the will of the smith which goes through his arm and hammer into the iron and converts it to steel; he drives his will into the metal, and that becomes the fibre in it. You don’t find it so in nature. The human soul must part with something and transfuse it into the inanimate iron, and there it will lie and last, for the will of man is divine and eternal.” (272)

Elijah goes on to say that he and Mehalah have worked their wills into each other, “transfusing their natures.” He tells her, “You are pouring yourself into me, and I into you, whether we know it or not, till in time we are alike in colour and tone and temperature.” Mehalah and Elijah are slowly changed by their time together, a time which necessarily increases after Elijah’s blindness.⁵ In his blinded state Elijah becomes an uncertain “wanderer”—as I described Mehalah in Chapter One. The man who mirrors his red tower-home and the woman with the comparable red cap are revealed more and more as “doubles.” At the end of the novel Elijah is pictured “with his finger feeling the inscription on the chimneypiece [of the family motto], with the red light glaring through the western window on his forehead, staining it crimson” (*Mehalah* 300).

The blinding by vitriol is foreshadowed by Elijah in one of his sermons to Mehalah, in which he uses vitriol as an illustration:

“Look at this,” he said, dropping some of the acid on the tarnished brass. “Look how it frets and boils till it has scummed away the filth, and then the brass is bright as gold. That’s like me. I’m fretted and fume with your opposition, and I dare say it is as well I get a little. But after a bit it will bring out the shining metal. You will see what I am. You don’t like me now, because I’m not shapely and handsome as your George De Witt. But there is the gold metal underneath ; he was but gilt pinchbeck—George De Witt!” (175)

Later there truly is a transformation in Elijah and in the way he is perceived by Mehalah.

⁵ Earlier in the novel, a negative “transfusing of natures” is described: “A morose expression clouded and disfigured her [Mehalah’s] countenance, once so frank and genial. Joe remarked to Jim [two servants at Red Hall] that she was growing like the master. Jim replied that folks who lived together mostly did resemble one another. He knew a collier who had a favourite bull-dog, and they were as alike in face as if they were twins.” (*Mehalah* 215)

Elijah's forge sermon ends appropriately with a proposal for a marriage of love as he offers her the newly crafted ring:

"Stretch out your hand, Glory, and let me put it on. Stretch out your hand over the hearth, above the fire; our God is a consuming fire, and this is His proper altar."
He stood on one side of the furnace, she on the other; the angry red coals glowed below, and a hot smoke rose from them. She extended her hand to him, and he grasped it with the left above the fire, and held the steel ring in his right.
"Glory!" he said in a tremulous voice. "At the altar in the church you swore to obey me. In the hall you knelt and swore to cherish me; here, over the fire, the figure of our God, as I put the iron ring on, swear to me also to love me." (273)

The tension here is intense, building throughout this scene—and the entire novel—suggesting some inevitable development. Elijah believes himself on the verge of achieving union with Mehalah by having her complete the marriage pledge. Whether this is likely to have happened is uncertain; nonetheless Mehalah, extending her hand, does seem to be drawn into the ceremonial ambiance that Elijah has created at the forge. The tension, built to a point where something *must* happen, is discharged by the sudden return of George. Mehalah runs to him, and the ring drops into the fire. This climatic, *true* marriage over God's "proper altar" is botched like the rest.⁶

George's advent is another of the novel's contradictory items, for while it absolves Elijah of his most heinous crime, it also causes Mehalah to discover bitterly that she has been dishonestly barred from union with George. It removes that great barrier to Mehalah's "growing compassion" while laying down another.

⁶ Though some caricatured Tractarian "Ritualists" as prizing form over substance (doubtless true for some), the thoughtful, philosophic Tractarian view held that medieval decorations and rituals actually make the church service more substantive and visceral, a palpable form for impalpable truths. Thus Elijah's forge has a practical "realness" about it which would resemble the ideal chapel as understood by a Tractarian like Baring-Gould. I suppose that a decidedly minimalist Protestant chapel seemed to Baring-Gould not practical, but rather zealously impoverished beyond normal practicality, which would contain a certain richness of "real life."

See Baring-Gould's ideal church service in *Origin*, Part 2, 287-9, which he quotes from Cardinal Wiseman's "Minor Rites and Offices" (August 1843, *Dublin Review*). (Wiseman (1802-1865) was an English Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church appointed Archbishop of Westminster after the Catholic Church's reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales in 1850.)

The Closing Threshold

George's arrival inaugurates the novel's closing threshold triad, as Mehalah stands between Elijah and George, resentfully restricted by marriage with Elijah from fulfilling her desire to be with George. As Mehalah says to Elijah,

You lied to me about George, a hateful lie that made me mad, and yet the reality is almost as bad—it is worse. He is alive and free, and I am bound, bound hand and foot, to you. (280)

Elijah laments that Mehalah is a “divided Glory,” dutifully serving restrictive Elijah while loving free George (283). After George's return, the “drawing together of the poles” regresses as Mehalah distances herself from her opposite; as Mehalah tells Elijah,

I give you only what I promised you, my obedience; never expect more. [...] You have obtained some sort of control over me, but my soul is free, my heart is free, and these you shall never bring into slavery. (*Mehalah* 282).

Mehalah has returned to the first stage of her marriage, “to obey.”

Elijah says that “[a]ll was so peaceful and beautiful, and then he [George] came from the dead and broke it into shivers” (*Mehalah* 279). Here is a variation on the Gothic theme of the past returning from the dead; in this case, it is the “modern” that has returned to disturb the claims of the past.

Before considering how the novel seems to contradict *Origin* philosophy, let us consider how Elijah's concept of conciliation, resembling Baring-Gould's conciliation, might be considered the solution to the Grimshoe paradox, which demands of Mehalah a choice between the two brothers while rendering her choice meaningless.

Elijah first connects himself and Mehalah to the battle of Grimshoe, saying it is *their* battle. Later he relates their conflict to his idea of dialectic conciliation.

These connections taken together establish Grimshoe as the problem and conciliation as the solution of their relationship. Using terms from Elijah's sermons, the opposed antipodal twins of Grimshoe, the divided "poles," fight continuously in "misery and pain" throughout the seemingly endless "waxing and waning" of time until the drawing together of these poles results in "the end of this world" and the "great flare and blaze and glory" of heaven (*Mehalah* 173).

In *Origin* Baring-Gould explains that when two men stand on the antipodes, all that one does is wrong in the terms of the other: "The rising sun in one hemisphere is the setting sun in the other; the zenith of one is the nadir of the other; when one hemisphere is enjoying day the other is steeped in darkness" (Part II, 41). He argues that one should move beyond this perspective:

But if we divest ourselves of this optical hallucination and endeavour to understand that, in the world of ideas, truth, like the earth, has two poles, that one idea no more excludes the inverse idea than the arctic pole excludes the antarctic pole; that, on the contrary, they imply each other, by defining and completing one another,—we arrive at an universal conciliation. (Part II, 44)

So all things perceived as antagonistically opposed are actually both sides of a single unity within a universal unity. Elijah states that the Grimshoe brothers "were twins, born the same hour, and they had but one heart and soul; what one willed that willed the other, what one desired that the other desired also" (*Mehalah* 146). This shared will was put into conflict when both brothers fell in love with the same woman. Their will and desire for her became conflicted *within their unity* and *because of their unity*, and "all their love turned to jealousy, and their brotherhood to enmity" (*Mehalah* 146)

When Mehalah meditates on the Grimshoe legend, she feels “as if she must take a part with one or the other; as if her so doing would determine the victory. But which should she will to conquer, when each was the counterpart of the other?” (*Mehalah* 154). It is nonsensical to choose either Grimshoe warrior over his identical brother; the brothers are “one” and it is their *unity* that should be chosen as the victor of the battle. The proper conciliatory manoeuvre is to allow and even encourage their conflict in anticipation of a gradual “drawing together” of the poles. The Grimshoe paradox, being *a choice that is no choice* requires choosing a *maintained* conflict of oppositions.

Grimshoe is an exaggerated, extreme version of the continual and long-lasting battle between Mehalah and Elijah, serving both as a warning (to conciliate opposition) and example (to maintain conflict). The Grimshoe battle may seem as if it is not in a process of conciliation, but, neither do the sun and moon, or the poles of the earth, and Elijah assures us that all of these are gradually, invisibly, drawing together as well.

Maintenance of an oppositional threshold is the first principle of conciliation which allows the conciliatory process; *specialization* and *negation* are the series of acts that break apart such a maintenance. In response to the Victorian religious schisms, Baring-Gould felt that what was needed was a continued interaction and continued conflict, which would then provide the opportunity to recognize positive truths, discard negations, and discover an “intermediate term” (*Origin*, Part II, 40) between oppositions. Then the muddled truth of their underlying synthesis of opposites would be revealed.

The idea of maintaining a conflict is central to Mehalah's relationship with Elijah (and to the Gothic threshold). In Mehalah's threshold position between George and Elijah, George is an extension of Mehalah as a projection of her ideal of freedom. Conversely, Elijah stands in opposition to both Mehalah and her projected self in George. Thus the contest between the cousins George and Elijah is a protracted form of the core contest between Elijah and Mehalah. George simply stands in for Mehalah and her desire for freedom. Mehalah stands both as a side of the conflict and outside of it (as when she imaginatively observes the Grimshoe battle which is her own).

Mehalah's choice of George is a choice to escape restriction, to negate the "other" part of her threshold self which she desires to evade. Negation has already been pre-figured as the wrong choice on the *Pandora* (in both threshold-choice scenarios the blond-haired choice is color-coded as the choice of negation). In this way George is a personification of Mehalah's specialization of freedom over restriction. In allowing Mehalah to negate the restrictive side of her threshold self, marriage with George would create a false, "*specialized*" unity. Much to Mehalah's annoyance and grief, Elijah repeatedly attacks her ideal, claiming that she would soon become unhappy in marriage with George. He claims (and the novel supports this claim) that it would not be a true marriage at all because George is not her "equal" (*Mehalah* 285), a relation also used to describe the battling Grimshoe twins.

Essential to Elijah's theory of conciliation is that one must find his or her double. The true set of doubles must be opposed to one another—equal yet distinct, the same yet distinguished in their opposition of wills. The Grimshoe twins are divided in their

shared desire for the same woman, and Mehalah and Elijah are divided, in part, in their opposition over the proper path of Mehalah's development.

George asks Mehalah to leave the past behind, but the concept of conciliation in Elijah's philosophy suggests that one should remain at the threshold—the meeting place of opposites. A maintained consideration of the Grimshoe conflict is figured in Mehalah's obsession with Grimshoe in which she imagines herself an intimate observer inside the barrow. Though Mehalah desires to escape towards the horizon, Elijah does his utmost to ensure that Mehalah comes to Red Hall, to the place of her Grimshoe conflict with Elijah and her threshold meditation between land and sea. Furthermore, Elijah forces Mehalah by marriage to join with him in a prolonged antagonism with restriction. Because of Elijah's actions Mehalah spends time “on the threshold” of the sea-wall, struggling between freedom and restriction, and in the end she feels that she must remain there.

Elijah is an antipodal twin standing in balanced opposition to Mehalah while George is only an extension of Mehalah's preference for freedom over restriction. Thus, with Elijah, and not George, Mehalah experiences the antagonistic fighting between opposite “poles.” For Mehalah to choose George is to escape the opposite “other,” so to choose Elijah is to choose to engage the self with the other. Marriage with Elijah is conciliation because by engaging with him she engages with the opposite. She is then forced to consider her threshold self in the fullness of its internal and external oppositions.

The botched, “Grimshoe” marriage of Elijah and Mehalah binds the two in a maintained conflict of contradiction, and during this conflict a gradual drawing

together of the poles occurs. The juxtaposition of Elijah's speeches on conciliation and Grimshoe suggest that after a *seemingly* endless conflict, the paradoxical impossibility of the contradictory union will be eventually overcome as contradictions are maintained into eventual synthesis. Through a gradual transfusion, the subjective observer gradually develops an expanded perspective and sees the opposition as an antinomy wrongly considered as antagonism (as with *Mehalah's* opening setting.)

The maintained contemplation of stark dichotomies is a foundation of Gothic fiction. Elijah creates a Gothic atmosphere in introducing "modern" Mehalah to an immediate, supernatural experience of the past in the Grimshoe conflict. In the Grimshoe story the past supernaturally persists into the modern day, creating a conflict between past and present as each world is made immediate yet exists in stark incongruity with the other. With the novel set at the time of the French Revolution, Mehalah has been placed by Baring-Gould on the cusp between the battling medieval and modern forces—and restriction and freedom.

The Turning Point

By the time George returns, this transfusing "marriage" between Mehalah and Elijah has been occurring for a while. This is most likely why Mehalah finds her ideal George to be less than she remembered him, as if she has been altered so as to be more sensitive to his faults. In their first conversation after his return, Mehalah attempts to explain in a heartfelt plea why she has married Elijah, and George responds in a flippant and dismissive manner.

She was silent. She was very unhappy. She did not like his tone: there was an insincerity, a priggishness about it which jarred with her reality and depth of feeling. But she could not

analyse what offended her. She thought he was angry with her, and had assumed a taunting air to cover his mortification. (*Mehalah* 278)

Perhaps this change causes Mehalah to give such a firm response to his pleas that they run away together.

George suggests that Mehalah has taken Elijah to her heart; otherwise, he tells her, “you would shake him off without another thought and follow me” (*Mehalah* 298). The reader may well share George’s suspicions about Mehalah’s feelings for Elijah, while she would be inclined to deny them.

Mehalah becomes frustrated in her attempts to communicate why she must stay with Elijah to this “new” George:

George! you ought to understand me. If I were to say these words to Elijah he would see through my heart at once, and all the thoughts in it would be visible to him as painted figures in a church window. To you they seem all broken and jumbled and meaningless.”
 “I tell you again, Glory, I do not understand you. Perhaps it is as well that we should live apart. I hate to have a knot in my hands I can’t untie. If Elijah understands you, keep to him. I shall look for a mate elsewhere.” (*Mehalah* 298-9)

After Mehalah tells George repeatedly that she cannot leave the threshold at Red Hall, he threatens to take as wife his old potential threshold-choice of Phoebe. Mehalah is shocked. She says that if he could do such a thing he would not be the George she “knew and loved and lost” (*Mehalah* 298).

At this point, immediately before the final chapter, Mehalah discovers the “true” George. As he leaves for Phoebe she tells him, “I never knew you, I never understood you” (*Mehalah* 299). Her reaction to the discovery of George’s true nature is described in religious terms:

She saw only the falling to pieces into dust of an idol. Better had George died, and she had lived on looking upon him as her ideal of manhood, noble, straightforward, truthful, constant. She would have been content to drudge on in her weary life at Red Hall and would have borne Elijah’s humours and her mother’s fretfulness, without a hope herself, if only she might still have maintained intact her image of all that was honourable and steadfast. She could not bear the revulsion of feeling. She was like a religionist who, on lifting the purple veil of the

sanctuary, has found his God, before whom he had offered libations and prayers, to be some grovelling beast. (*Mehalah* 301)

This description of a “religionist” who shockingly uncovers the repulsive object of his worship is drawn from an account by Saint Clement on Egyptian worship, which Baring-Gould apparently found thought-provoking, because he quotes it in *Origin* and *Village Conferences on the Creed* (48).

“The sanctuaries of the temples,” says Clement of Alexandria, “are covered with veils of gold tissue; but if you advance towards the end of the temple and search for the statue, a minister of the temple advances, with a grave air, chanting a hymn in Egyptian, and raises the veil a little, as though to show you the god. Then what do you see? A cat, a crocodile, an indigenous serpent, or some other dangerous animal! The god of the Egyptians appears; . . . it is a wild beast wallowing on a purple carpet.” (*Origin*, Part I, 187)

Baring-Gould goes on to describe this scenario as exemplifying a danger in the process of religious development:

...even when the significance of an emblem is not misconstrued or forgotten, the vulgar are liable to forget that after all it only represents one side of the religious idea...

Likewise, Mehalah’s construction of George as an idol was transfixed on “one side” of an idea in her specialization of freedom over restriction. As Elijah had predicted, Mehalah discovers in disgust that her ideal is very little apart from her own idealization. George was Mehalah’s idol of “modernity.” George suggested that Mehalah abandon the past, and Baring-Gould believed that a negating, *excessive* modernity, and any excessive outlook, was necessarily based on presumptions built up around an underdeveloped core—like a majestic temple housing an animal god.

The collapse of Mehalah’s original mechanism for understanding and developing herself causes her to turn and run to Elijah:

She lifted her hands to heaven, pressed them to her heart, and then ran with extended arms back to Red Hall, stumbling and recovering herself, and fluttering on, still with arms outstretched, like a wounded bird trying to rise but unable, seeking a covert where it may hide its head and die. (*Mehalah* 299-300)

Now in a reverse direction from the earlier image of the wounded gull, she turns to Red Hall, seeking solace “in the depths” of her former captivity.

She had come to him, to the only heart that was constant, that was not to be shaken and moved from its anchorage; to the only soul that answered to her own, to the only mind that read her thoughts. The George of her fancy, the ideal of truth and steadfastness, was dissolved, and had disappeared leaving a mean vulgar object behind from which she shrank. To him whom she had hated, with whom she had fought and against whom she had stiffened her back, she now flew as her only support, her only anchorage. (*Mehalah* 300)

With George gone, and Mehalah running towards Elijah, the full momentum of “the poles drawing together” returns. Nonetheless, any possible conciliation of Mehalah and Elijah is spoiled when Elijah in his madness attempts to achieve “conciliation” by way of their tragic deaths.

A “Repulsive” Novel

Mehalah has a consistently gloomy tone; its tragic conclusion remains nonetheless surprising. The author took up the complicated task of revealing the villain Elijah as a better match for Mehalah than the hero George—only for Elijah then to murder her. The deep tragedy of the novel is that just as Mehalah is turning to Elijah (as he predicted), he feels the need to force their unity in a macabre parody of marriage in which he and Mehalah are wrapped in chains and joined in death.

The reader, like Mehalah, becomes entranced in the taut drawing together of a *true* marriage of opposites, and feels the tragedy of its disruption, both when George arrives and then more definitively at the ending. The reader has been purposefully led to desire a union between Elijah and Mehalah (or at any rate see it as the best conclusion). In desiring this marriage, we are led to share, at least in this respect, the sentiment of Baring-Gould for prizing conciliation of opposites.

Why did Baring-Gould write this gloomy novel, and why did he end it in such an inexplicable way? Baring-Gould provides his own answer to this question in the diary entry of 12 December 1880 that I referenced last chapter:

Received 2 great bundles of reviews of my “Mehalah” from the publisher, most say that it is clever, but repulsive [...]. I admit that Mehalah is unpleasant and bitter. I wrote it when greatly depressed and embittered by two most ungentlemanly reviews of my “Germany” in the Academy and the Saturday. The first was offensive and insulting to the last degree, there were other reviews most unfair and captious, accusing me of blunders I had not made. I had taken such pains over my book, and am convinced it really did contain so much information – blunders some there were I was ready to acknowledge – that I was hurt more than I can express by the attitude of the reviewers. (Wawman 84-5)

Baring-Gould suggests that his depression was brought on by the critical treatment of his *Germany, Past and Present* (1879).⁷ He goes on to write that the negative reviews caused financial trouble as well: “Moreover they spoiled the sale of the book, at the very time when I was sore distressed for money, as the farmers could not pay their rent at Lew nor those at Mersea their tithe” (Wawman 85). Here Baring-Gould describes dual difficulties in his offices of squire and parson, both caused by poor farming yields and low prices for produce. The Agricultural Depression had begun around 1879. The onset of the depression might have contributed to Baring-Gould’s low spirits, particularly as it suggested a continual slump in British fortunes.

Baring-Gould states that the writing of *Mehalah* served as a catharsis for the depression brought on by the damaging reviews and the agricultural muddle: “In the bitterness of my spirit I wrote Mehalah very quickly in a month, without a pause, and poured out in it my wrath and bile. Then I was better.”

Such are the reasons given by Baring-Gould for his depression. Such reasons, though in themselves substantial, do not seem to account fully for the unexpected

⁷ *Germany, Past and Present*, 2 vols., London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1879.

depth of the bitterness and tragedy in the novel, and I would like to consider other sources of the depression that was cathartically poured into the writing of *Mehalah*.

In his discussion of Baring-Gould's diary, Ron Wawman suggests that the major contribution to Baring-Gould's intense depression was the tragic death in 1876 of his two-year-old daughter Beatrice from whooping cough. Wawman discusses Baring-Gould's regret and sorrow resulting from this loss:

Sabine's acknowledgement of the failure on the part of himself or Grace to recognise the seriousness of Beatrice's illness could imply feelings of guilt and it is possible that these feelings exacerbated both the length and severity of the bereavement reaction. Beatrice would have been too young to need the sacrament for the dying, but it could be that Sabine regretted that she did not receive the sacrament of extreme unction to give her both spiritual assistance and strength in her last agony. (236).

Wawman argues that Beatrice's death significantly affected Baring-Gould's writing, both in volume and content. While Baring-Gould published an astounding amount of writing throughout his adult life, his literary production dipped significantly in 1877-8, and 1878 was the only year between 1850 and the year of his death in 1924 in which he had nothing published.

There is no evidence of other life events likely to have affected his literary output to such an extent at this time. [...] Allowing for items already written and sent to publishers prior to Beatrice's death being published in the months immediately following her death in 1876, the sharp dip in 1877-8 suggests the possibility of a direct relationship between the death and the hiatus in publication. (Wawman 235-6, drawing from an extensive bibliography by Roger Bristow⁸).

Wawman suggests that family responsibilities "may have contributed to some of the reduction in Sabine's literary output in the 1870s" (235)—and perhaps these responsibilities also contributed to his anxieties and later depression. Sabine's father died in 1872, giving Sabine the role and responsibilities of squire, and he became

⁸ *A Bibliography of the Works of S. Baring-Gould*. 2005, available from the author. I have found this detailed bibliography to be an invaluable resource in my research on Baring-Gould.

occupied with handling the business of the estate. Sabine also became responsible for his step-mother and her two children, as well as his mentally-ill brother William, who was placed in a lunatic asylum in 1875 after violently attacking Sabine (Wawman 228). These may explain some of Baring-Gould's diminished output, but his loss of Beatrice is the more immediate and convincing reason.

The content of Baring-Gould's literary production in the years following his loss also indicates the impact of this tragic occurrence. *The Mystery of Suffering* (1877)⁹ was one of the few works published at this time. Its lectures come from a series given by Sabine years before. Wawman suggests that Baring-Gould turned again to these lectures when seeking answers in his grief (Wawman 235-6). *Sermons to Children* (1879), contains a sermon on mourning and the hope of the Resurrection.¹⁰

Alongside these comforting works Baring-Gould wrote a bitter and vindictive short story, "Wafted Away," only twenty-one days after Beatrice's death (Wawman 234). Published in pamphlet form,¹¹ "Wafted Away" (1876) is a merciless attack on the Oxford Movement's enemies and persecutors. It depicts an Anglican bishop attempting to shut down a Tractarian service in London, only to be accidentally swept away by a wayward hook attached to hot-air balloon. The bishop, who believes that he is experiencing a transcendent spiritual experience, is then literally dragged through a series of humiliating and physically painful situations which in different ways mock him and his religious viewpoint.

⁹ *The Mystery of Suffering: Six Lectures*, London: Skeffington & Co., 1877.

¹⁰ *Sermons to Children* [1st of Two Series], 2 vols., London: W. Skeffington & Sons, 1879.

¹¹ London: G. J. Palmer, 1876.

At this time the Public Worship Act (1874) had only recently been passed and its effects were being felt. Tractarians were receiving a concentrated and legally empowered repulsion and persecution. In Baring-Gould's understanding, the Church was attacking its true Catholic core. How could the Anglican Church be the conciliating Catholic power envisioned in *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief* when it was so divided in its own body and heavily persecuting those who treasured the Catholic tradition?

Baring-Gould regularly displayed strong and even bitter religious opinions on Tractarian issues, but the severity of the attacks in "Wafted Away" suggests that he found in the Tractarian cause—as in his response to the *Germany* reviews—a trigger and channel for his grief (Wawman 236).

Baring-Gould experienced frustration, disappointment, and disillusionment over both the Church and the daughter he loved so much. His depression over Beatrice seems to have resonated with his frustration with the Anglican Church over its treatment of Tractarians. His loss was channeled into attacks against Anti-Tractarian forces in the Anglican Church, and ultimately merged with these attacks in the cathartic release of emotions in *Mehalah*, his first extensive piece of fiction written after Beatrice's death.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, many of Baring-Gould's personal troubles and experiences found their way into the pages of *Mehalah*. As he describes in the *Court Royal* preface, Baring-Gould placed his ideas in fiction when he reached the end of his ability to think through them. Perhaps Baring-Gould "externally" worked through his feelings concerning Beatrice's death by writing on the death of a

young person who had yet to develop towards her potential in *Mehalah*. Like “Wafted Away,” the emotional critique of the Anglican Church found in *Mehalah* would seem to express his Tractarian attitude and his sorrow over his daughter.

The Crumbling Church

The first mention of church in *Mehalah* is during Abraham’s suggestion that Mehalah marry Elijah, and, throughout the novel, church is exclusively associated with marriage. Abraham speaks on the purpose of churches as one of his “doctrines”:

A man, you see, don’t make no odds of taking up with a girl, and then when he’s had a bit of her tongue and temper, he thinks he’d as lief be without her, and pick up another. He’d ring a whole change on the bells, he would, if it warn’t for churches. That is my doctrine. Churches was built, and parsons were made, for tying up of men, and the girls are fools who let the men make up to them, and don’t seize the opportunity to tie them. (*Mehalah* 182)

In his austere, grim manner Abraham expresses an understanding of the Church faintly relatable to Baring-Gould’s: that the Church exists for the chief purpose of marriage—or, in Baring-Gould’s way of thinking, conciliation.

During Mehalah’s attempt to escape from Red Hall, the narrator mentions the church at Salcot with its “handsome tower” but then moves quickly and with more purpose to the neighboring, decrepit church in Virley. Virley Church’s medieval structure was considered hazardously dilapidated during Baring-Gould’s time on Mersea.¹² Little was more repugnant to Baring-Gould—or more symbolic—than an ugly or neglected church building. In *Mehalah* he describes Virley Church with an almost rabid enthusiasm:

¹² Virley Church collapsed in 1884 during the “Great Colchester Earthquake” (also known as the “Great English Earthquake” and the “Essex Earthquake”), which shook Colchester and surrounding villages. The building remains in ruins today (though work has been done to preserve the site).

Within a bowshot, across the creek, connected with it [Salcot] by a bridge, is Virley church, a small hunchbacked edifice in the last stages of dilapidation, in a graveyard unhedged, unwall'd; the church is scrambled over by ivy, with lattice windows bulged in by the violence of the gales, and a bellcot leaning on one side like a drunkard. Near this decaying church is a gabled farm, and this and a cottage form Virley village. The principal population congregates at Salcot . . . (*Mehalah* 183-4)

The narrator paints Virley church and its neighboring farm as blending together into one monstrous whole:

The churchyard and the farmyard seemed all one. The pigs were rooting at the graves. A cow was lying in the porch. An old willow drooped over a stagnant pool beneath the chancel window. [...] Every rib showed in the roof as on the side of a horse led to the knackers. (*Mehalah* 185-6)

Significantly, Virley is the only church building and congregation in the novel that receives any attention.

The narrator's criticisms of Virley Church make up paragraph after paragraph of detailed offenses: it has but one cracked bell, no known patron saint, and a congregation of smugglers and wreckers, not one of whom could be properly termed a "worshipper." The Ten Commandments adorning the east window have all the "nots" scratched out—and we are told that "the parishioners conscientiously did their utmost to fulfil the letter of the law thus altered." The "one respectable feature" of the church, "a massive chancel-arch" is said to slouch "in the attitude of the Virley men in the village street waiting to insult the women as they went by" (*Mehalah* 232-3).

The list continues in describing the tattered instruments of service: the altar, a basic deal table, is rotten; its only cover is a red cotton pocket-handkerchief. The communion plate, "surplice with high collar," and register-book are all spoiled from neglect.

The church is neglected by its clergy in particular. The “Siamese-twin parishes” (*Mehalah* 232) of Salcot and Virley both have absentee rectors who have jointly appointed one curate for both parishes. We are told that all rectors in the region stay away to avoid the ague, and the parishes have suffered from their absence. Both the building and area’s spiritual life are depicted as in an extreme state of abandon and decay.

With the rectors away Church responsibilities are taken up by the curates. Mr. Rabbit is the curate at Virley, the one who told *Mehalah* to “botch up” her situation by marrying. Rabbit is a ruined man resembling Virley Church.¹³ He is fragile and sheepish, perpetually stunned by the uproar of his life.

As with marriages, clergy in *Mehalah* are only depicted negatively. Another example of ministerial deficiency is revealed when *Mehalah* goes to the curate of West Mersea for assistance in her trials caused by Elijah. Parson Tyll is the single curate for West Mersea, East Mersea, and a parish on the mainland.

The rector was non-resident, on the plea of the unsalubrity [*sic*] of the spot. He had held the rectory of one parish and the vicarage of the other thirty years, and during that period had visited his cures twice, once to read himself in, and on the other occasion to exact some tithes denied him. (*Mehalah* 112)

Tyll is depicted for the most part with his face in the dirt and his hind-parts in the air, too obsessed with potatoes to assist poor *Mehalah*. He speaks incessantly of potatoes, as if he is limited to the “material” dirt and oblivious to his spiritual duties:

¹³ Mr. Rabbit’s battered state corresponds with Baring-Gould’s belief and fear that a life of rural, isolated church service could destroy a man’s mental facilities: “*Mehalah* crossed the fen indicated, passed beside the windmill and the blacksmith’s shop, and found the cottage occupied by the curate, a poor man, married to a woman of a low class, with a family of fourteen children, packed in the house wherever they could be stowed away. The curate was a crushed man, his ideas stunned in his head by the uproar in which he dwelt. His old scholarship remained to him in his brain like fossils in the chalk, to be picked out, dead morsels. There was nothing living in the petrified white matter that filled his skull” (*Mehalah* 187).

Don't plant too close, and not in ridges. I'll tell you what I do. I put mine in five feet apart and make heaps round each. I don't hold by ridges. Hillocks is my doctrine. [...] Take my advice, be good, grow potatoes. (*Mehalah* 112-3)

Tyll (with his apt name, like Mr. Rabbit's) is based on an East Mersea parson before Baring-Gould's occupancy, a favorite of the congregation because, "engrossed in his garden, [he] had left them undisturbed" (Purcell 102).

Mehalah seeks out help from both parsons, and finds none. These ineffective curates and their absentee rectors are part of the broken Church system in *Mehalah*, which is centered on the symbol of the ruined church building in Virley. The ruined church was a symbol often employed by Victorian writers, corresponding to a common enough belief, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that the Anglican Church was a ruined and crumbling establishment. Purcell discusses this connection between the ruined church building in fiction and the state of the Anglican Church:

It is no accident that the churches in Dickens are for the most part romantically crumbling edifices, ivy strangling them: sometimes the very tombs gaping open, so that charity boys played with bones in the churchyard until moved on by the beadle. (48)

The Church reform movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were responding to this idea of the "crumbling" Church—neglected by its clergymen, abandoned by its people, and corrupt in leadership (Purcell 39). The ruined church building and the analogous Anglican Church were pictured as decaying corpses, lacking any vitalizing spirituality.

Mehalah is set in the late-eighteenth century, possibly the time of the Anglican Church's most desperate state of "dilapidation" (Purcell 33). The dire descriptions of Virley Church and clergy of the region point to the neglect and apathy targeted by Tractarians from their inception and throughout the nineteenth century.

According to Tractarians, the problems that the Church of England faced at the turn of the century still needed to be addressed in the late nineteenth century. When commenting on the deteriorated church of eighty years before, Baring-Gould was also commenting on the church of his own time.

Mehalah's narrator blatantly connects the decaying Virley Church of “a hundred years ago” (184) with the 1870s controversy in the Anglican Church over “Ritualism” by way of a wry observation:

No such controversy as that which has of late years agitated the Church of England relative to the position of the celebrant could have affected Virley, for the floor in the midst, before the altar, had been eaten through by rats, emerging from an old grave, and exposed below gnawed and mouldy bones a foot beneath the boards. (*Mehalah* 233-4)

Here Baring-Gould mocks the focus of some anti-Ritualist and Anglo-Catholics on the more fastidious detail of the “Ritualism” debate, while pointing out that the Church itself was decaying amidst such squabbles. He is furthermore advocating for the Oxford Movement (though he doesn’t directly associate himself with the movement) by offering this ugly, chaotic church as an alternative to the reverential and mystical Tractarian ceremony. Virley Church is Baring-Gould’s view of the Church in magnified form, a display of the physical and spiritual “ugliness” which was to be avoided by “the proper positioning of the celebrant”—that is, by a recognition of the Church’s Catholic tradition and authority. Like the medieval church building in Virley, Baring-Gould felt this tradition had been neglected.

Baring-Gould readily took up the decaying church as a literary symbol. At age seventeen he took up his three main purposes in life: the restoration of his family manor and the entire estate, including the tenant properties; the refurbishment of his family church at Lew; and the revitalization of the spiritual life of its parishioners

(Wawman 226). Baring-Gould felt that each of these restorations was complementary to the others (and all three notably fall within the extensive scope of a squarson). The inscription on Baring-Gould's tombstone is *Paravi lucernam Christo meo*, "I have prepared a lantern for my Christ." Purcell says that this inscription "summed up the driving aim of his life's work, and no understanding of him is possible without an understanding of this" (5).

At age fifteen, after his family had escaped France during the 1848 Revolution, Sabine visited Lew Church. Dickinson describes his reaction:

Used as he was to the beauty of Roman Catholic churches on the Continent, the little parish church appalled him, for it had been the victim of a remarkable act of vandalism, perpetrated sixteen years previously. In 1832, in order to make it spruce and tidy for his youngest son, shortly to be instituted as rector, Sabine's grandfather had swept away all the ancient oak pews and also the decaying but magnificent rood-screen, which had been the glory of the church. In their place he had installed deal 'horse-box' pews and a new deal pulpit, all of which were painted a bright mustard yellow. To heighten the effect the altar was adorned with a bright blue altar-cloth and the pulpit provided with blue hangings fringed with yellow. (Dickinson 22-3)

The yellow and blue were not liturgically based, rather being the colors of the Baring-Gould coat-of-arms. Sabine, young but opinionated, was "shocked and disgusted" by the state of his family church (Dickinson 23).

Lew Church became even more "ugly" like Virley Church as its "shocking" decorations aged over the years and suffered neglect. In 1876, at the age of forty-one, Baring-Gould was able to begin Lew Church's restoration. He was now squire of Lew Trenchard, though still rector at East Mersea while his aged Uncle Charles still held the living at Lew. Baring-Gould anticipated becoming both squire and parson at Lew Trenchard.

The distance from East Mersea and financial strain kept Baring-Gould from restoring Lew Church and his manor home for the time being, but during a visit to Lew in 1876 he did begin to make some preliminary changes to the church.

Early in 1876, Sabine began the restoration of Lew Church. He demolished the ugly, deal pews and replaced them with carved oak benches. The altar was a disgrace, [...] the receptacle for the communion plate and his uncle's robes. It was covered with a moth-eaten blue baize table cloth. All that Sabine could afford to do at the time was to provide a new altar frontal. They returned to East Mersea on 8 April. (Kirk-Smith 114)

This work began only a few years before the writing of *Virley Church* in *Mehalah*. It is worth also noting that Beatrice died in March, during this time of church restoration.

For Baring-Gould, a critique of the ruined Anglican Church was at heart a critique of the Church's conciliatory or "marrying" power. Baring-Gould selected Virley Church as the proper place for the "botched" wedding ceremony of Mehalah and Elijah. There really is no reason in the story as to why Elijah should have chosen to be married at Virley Church instead of the sound Salcot Church, except that Baring-Gould found it an appropriate place for their union.

In the novel, the wedding day is directly preceded by the novel's extensive look at a Virley Church (later tacitly contrasted with the "true altar" and "true marriage" of Elijah's forge). Though few regularly attend at Virley, the church becomes completely filled with a curious, disorderly crowd for the unusual wedding of Elijah and Mehalah. "The gallery was full to bursting. Sailor-boys in the front amused themselves with dropping broken bits of tobacco-pipe on the heads below, and giggling at the impotent rage of those they hit" (*Mehalah* 234). The besmattered local chimney sweep finds a seat at the altar, "facing west, in the post of dignity occupied in the Primitive Church by the bishop" (*Mehalah* 235). Men and boys

follow his example and fill the chancel. Loud clamoring echoes throughout the building, and between bell rings the ringer can be heard cursing from striking his knuckles.

The ridiculous, self-important Mrs. De Witt, having taken responsibility for directing the affair, leads Elijah and Mehalah into the midst of this circus-like atmosphere. Presiding is the sheepish, sneezing Mr. Rabbit. He is no match for the domineering Elijah, and does meekly as he is told. Here we see that Tractarian complaint of the dominance of powerful figures over the clergy. As represented in Mr. Rabbit, the clergy seem to have no strength, unable to perform anything other than “botched” marriages.

A disrespectful and disorderly congregation like that in Virley was strongly connected in Baring-Gould’s mind with the riots against Ritualism in the latter half of the nineteenth century—another form of harassment in addition to the Public Worship Regulation Act. The protests at St George-in-the-East, which became infamous throughout England, were witnessed by Baring-Gould as a young man. During these riots protestors regularly attended Ritualist services only to disrupt them.

Between June 1859 and May 1860 [...] Sunday afternoons at St. George’s were the zoo and horror and coconut-shy¹⁴ of London. The best days witnessed pew doors banging or feet scraping or hissing or coughing or syncopated responses. The worst days witnessed gleeful rows of boys shooting with peas from the gallery, fireworks, flaming speeches from tub-orators during service, bleating as of goats, spitting on choirboys, a pair of hounds howling gin-silly round the nave, cushions hurled at the altar, orange-peel and butter, kicking or hustling of clergy. (Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part I, 499)¹⁵

Such experiences gave Baring-Gould ample material for his Virley Church congregation. The “vandalised” and neglected church and the unruly congregation

¹⁴ A carnival game in which one throws or “shies” balls in an attempt to knock down suspended coconuts.

¹⁵ *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols., London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966).

were both personally associated by Baring-Gould with the cause of the Oxford Movement, and both feature in the wedding scene of *Mehalah*.

Elijah's sermons connect his marriage with *Mehalah* and universal conciliation. Conciliation in Baring-Gould's philosophy is brought about by religion, and ultimately by the Catholic Church. But the Anglican Church in *Mehalah* is decrepit, both in building and ministry. The rectors are absent. The curates are weak or disconnected. The marriage service at Virley is a mockery—a pathetic display of the joining of opposites, a criticism of the Church's tarnished conciliatory power. If Virley Church is a symbol of the ruined Anglican Church in Baring-Gould's time, then the marriage service inside is a symbol of the Church's lost power to “marry” properly. How can the Church conciliate all of the contradictions of its society when it is only a corpse-like shell—filled with schisms and engendering various schismatic responses to the controversies of its time? The bleak conclusion of *Mehalah* reveals the lack of conciliatory power in the setting of the novel.

Baring-Gould and the Murder of *Mehalah*

I will now draw towards my conclusion by discussing the tragic ending of *Mehalah*, the nadir of the novel's gloomy plot. The deepest tragedy of the ending is felt in the conclusive collapse of the “drawing together” of the “poles” after the reader has been led to desire and anticipate some sort of conciliation.

Why did Baring-Gould write an ending that seemingly contradicts the novel's most delicately handled dynamic in making a hero of its villain? *Mehalah* is a character whom Baring-Gould obviously admires, so for what reason does he fashion

her murder? How might the ending serve as a culmination of Baring-Gould's impassioned critique of the Anglican Church? Furthermore, what other aspects of Baring-Gould's complex emotions and thoughts at the time of his daughter's death are being realized in the ending?

Does *Mehalah* contradict *Origin* and its own suggestions of conciliation by making a tragic mockery of the novel's final "marriage"? One possibility is that the loss of Beatrice amidst Anglican difficulties led the author to experience a crisis of faith in which conciliation seemed impossible or at least unlikely, particularly amidst modern difficulties. Or, perhaps in his gloomy mood Baring-Gould felt conciliation only possible in the extremity of death. Though these are possible explanations, I would also like to consider others as well.

First I will return to my earlier comparison between Baring-Gould and Elijah. After all, Baring-Gould does "kill" *Mehalah* through Elijah, and throughout the novel Elijah becomes a more fascinating and sympathetic character mainly by his adoption of his author's attributes: Elijah falls in love with an extraordinary young woman "below him"; he cares for his mad brother while "usurping" his brother's inheritance; he preaches sermons on the dialectic.

Yet while Elijah resembles Baring-Gould in certain details, they are also quite obviously different. Most obviously, Elijah is an unscrupulous and often cruel villain.

I would relate this ambivalent resemblance and contrast to the idea that *Mehalah* presents Baring-Gould's ambivalent consideration of Mersea as both with and without his influence—that is, abiding both Baring-Gould's "absence" and his

“presence” on Mersea. As I will explain, this ambivalence resulted from Baring-Gould’s hopes, frustrations, and sorely felt failures related to his Mersea ministry.

As I have discussed in the previous section, the dismal Church and people in *Mehalah* illustrate what Baring-Gould would consider the *absence* of a Tractarian presence. *Mehalah* takes place before Baring-Gould’s Tractarian influence arrived in East Mersea. Perhaps Baring-Gould considered the spiritually searching rural person of the late eighteenth century, embodied in *Mehalah*, to need the influence of someone like himself, a thoughtful Tractarian with an expansive theory, unlike a weak Parson Rabbit and a distant Parson Tyll (based as he was on Baring-Gould’s predecessor). *Mehalah* has a strong spiritual longing, but no spiritual guidance or assistance.

Yet despite his belief in the truth and power of a Catholic ministry, Baring-Gould did not have the happiest ten years as parson of East Mersea. His ministry was not as effective as it was in Yorkshire and would be afterward at Lew Trenchard. Besides the uncongenial nature of the place and people, his anticipation of one day appointing himself to the living of Lew Trenchard to be both parson and squire made it difficult for him to settle in Mersea and overcome his discontent.

Elijah in part suggests the “presence” of Baring-Gould in his novel. Like Baring-Gould, Elijah is an unusual, passionate man. Perhaps Elijah, in some of his qualities, is how Baring-Gould assumed himself to appear to the rural communities of Horbury, Dalton, and Mersea—or, considering the relationship of Elijah and *Mehalah*, how he might have first appeared to the mill girl whom he would eventually marry. Baring-Gould could be an intimidating presence, partly by virtue of a

stubborn, strongly opinionated, and domineering manner. Like Elijah, Baring-Gould spoke of a strange, dialectical philosophy. In opposition to the clergymen of the novel, Elijah provides Mehalah with a spiritual “education” that shocks her by speaking to her grand, transcendent aspirations. Baring-Gould had his own ancient home and land that he knew would amaze his wife Grace, as Mehalah is awed by Elijah’s Red Hall.

The character Mr. Pettican was inspired by a tenant who stayed at Lew Trenchard manor while Baring-Gould was at Mersea. Elijah’s interaction with Mr. Pettican greatly resembles Baring-Gould’s interaction with this tenant (Dickinson 66-7). All of these examples suggest that Baring-Gould “interacted” with his novel through the persona of Elijah, perhaps consciously.

Both Baring-Gould and Elijah are not only “preachers” but also “Gothic” story-tellers. As I discussed earlier, Elijah tells Mehalah the key Gothic story-within-a-story of Grimshoe. Correspondingly, Elijah resembles the author as an *authorial* character. For one thing, he guides the plot as he secretly manipulates Mehalah’s life like some hidden author. By these acts he forces her into a Gothic threshold position. He also authoritatively “interprets” the novel for us by saying, for instance, what Grimshoe “means.” Elijah’s interpretations also eventually encourage the reader’s desire for his conciliation with Mehalah. Elijah is an authorial character, but he is also the Gothic villain, placing his interpretations and motivations in question.

Baring-Gould’s simultaneous “presence” and “absence” in the novel seems likely derived from his troubled thoughts on his ministry in Mersea. Though he had some small victories, he was on the whole not very successful in connecting with the

people. So he was a “present” Tractarian influence, but not to the full extent of his ideals and hopes. Furthermore, he may have felt guilt regarding his neglect of his church. Baring-Gould at times took trips from his parish to the Continent for extended periods to combat his recurring lung problems, provide his family a more salubrious atmosphere, and escape the difficulties of Mersea life.

Dickinson states that, “[a]s far as one can make out, East Mersea did not see much of its rector” in 1877, the year after the death of Beatrice (68). Baring-Gould’s daughter Margaret had become ill, and Baring-Gould, understandably fearful for her health, took the entire family to the continent for an extended holiday in Friburg im Breisgau.

Concerning Baring-Gould’s “colossal” work *The Lives of the Saints* Dickinson asks, “To what extent did he neglect his work as a parish priest for the sake of this self-imposed task?” (65). Baring-Gould wrote *The Lives of the Saints* as a contribution to the Oxford Movement, but he may have also felt that it borrowed time and energy from his actual work “in the fields.” In his absences and occupations Baring-Gould may have felt that he was like those absentee rectors in *Mehalah*.

Baring-Gould’s absences are often understandable, but perhaps his failure in reaching the people and his lengthy absences made the idea of a Tractarian absence all the more painfully evident to him. Perhaps any guilt he felt was expressed, along with his mourning over Beatrice, in *Mehalah*.

Much of the novel is constructed around this bewildering ambivalence of Baring-Gould’s Tractarian absence and presence. The novel’s ending participates in this ambivalence by contradicting the momentum of “Tractarian” conciliation which

has come before. Baring-Gould's "presence" and "absence" is centered on the character of Elijah, and the novel culminates in the ambivalence of Elijah as hero and villain, both the proper match for Mehalah and her murderer. Elijah is the preacher of conciliation, but he destroys conciliation in the end.

Negating Free-Will

Elijah's thoughts on his marriage with Mehalah are consistent with the idea of conciliation—overcoming of opposites into unity—but in the end he cannot endure the free-will that might choose to oppose that unity. At the conclusion of his first sermon to Mehalah at Red Hall, Elijah states that he has the power to "draw" her to him through a sort of mystical connection of wills, but that he would rather she choose him of her "own free will" (*Mehalah* 179). Later in the novel, when he learns that George has returned, Elijah becomes less and less willing to bear the unpredictable possibilities of Mehalah's free-will. Throughout the novel Elijah is impatient with the *developing* human experience, valuing far more what he sees as its idyllic outcome in conciliation.

Perhaps Baring-Gould's own frustration with free-will is surfacing in Elijah's frustration. Holding a belief-system like *Origin* makes one prone to be impatient with the unpredictable free-will of others, knowing what they *should* be using their free-will to develop towards. Evident in *Origin* is an intense frustration over the choices of those who reject the Catholic way, particularly the overly "Protestant" Protestants. For example:

...public opinion has proved a far more powerful engine than spiritual or temporal autocracy for grinding all men into one dead, drear level. [...] A thousand hands are lifted against the

man who would raise art out of the gutter, teach a goodness higher than respectability, and declare that the horizon of the eagle is not that of the badger. (Vol II, 380)

On a local level, Baring-Gould's work at East Mersea was exasperatingly at the mercy of his congregation's uncontrollable freedom. He desired to impress his ideas on a congregation, but they often resisted any force for change coming from religion. The fiery speeches of Elijah to Mehalah might then be less-restrained versions of Baring-Gould's sermons to his Mersea congregation— unregulated, shocking, and threatening. Like Elijah, Baring-Gould's pleading sermons were often futile.

Perhaps a frustrated Baring-Gould vicariously "kills" his East Mersea congregation via the character of Mehalah, all while acknowledging—perhaps in embittered hopefulness—that she *does* seek transcendence and eventually does begin to turn towards conciliation. While Mehalah does seek some sort of spiritual ideal, she pursues it in the form of worthless George. Elijah's frustration with Mehalah's idealization of George seems very similar to a parson's frustration over a resistant congregation, and particularly over those who display promise yet don't live up to it. Baring-Gould argues in *Origin* all people have an internal "Revelation" which directs them to strive for the infinite, but that most becomes distracted and misguided. The searching Mehalah could then represent spiritual seekers generally.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Baring-Gould saw modernity, like all movements, as a push towards a specialization against a previous, opposite specialization. He felt that the modern tendency, epitomized in the Victorian mid-century religious controversies, was to negate and create false, schismatic unity by disregarding other truths as false. *Mehalah's* ending could reveal a bitterness concerning the Mersea people—but only within a much larger bitterness concerning

the world's march into modernity, which seemed to bring division and not conciliation.

Baring-Gould saw this modern tendency as pervasive and contrary to the conciliating mission of the Church. Nonetheless, he felt that the Anglican Church was also negating: the Broad Church negating tradition and spirituality, the traditionalist negating scientific thought, and the Church leaders negating the beliefs of Tractarianism. By negating contradictory viewpoints, these factions in the Church could not hope to conciliate. According to Baring-Gould (and Elijah), true conciliation requires a maintained conflict of contradictory ideas, leading to synthesis. Conversely, Baring-Gould saw religious controversies and doctrinal disagreement in his day to be leading to the widening split of contradictory schools of thought.

Mehalah contains a criticism of the Anglican Church's facility to "marry" in the ruined church of Virley, and the final chapter seems a culmination of this critique. *Origin* and *Mehalah* were both written in response to the Church and its inability to conciliate modern schisms, though *Origin* is a direct response while *Mehalah* is more an emotional, artistic response, incorporating the tumultuous years on Mersea.

As I have discussed, *Mehalah*'s gloomy tone and tragic ending seem influenced by two main sources of extreme frustration which, for Baring-Gould, became intertwined: the death of his daughter and his frustration with the Anglican Church. His depression over Beatrice intensified his religious anger, and this religious anger allowed him to direct his sorrow towards a palpable enemy. Other influences joining with these are the many anxieties related to his roles as squire, parson, and author.

Mehalah builds anticipation for conciliation, but Elijah causes the tragic ending by a too hasty conciliation that creates a false unity. Before killing her, Elijah literally takes away *Mehalah*'s free-will by striking her unconscious, just as she was possibly turning to him. He says that he must ensure their marriage by negating the choice of the oppositely positioned, antipodal twin.

“My Glory! my own dearest! my only one!” he moaned. “I could not help it. You would have left me had I not done this. There was no other way out of the tangle, there was no other path into the light. (*Mehalah* 305).

Elijah's act of negating *Mehalah*'s free-will encompasses all such “necessary” modern negations. It reflects, for instance, the Anglican Church's “negation” of free-will in the Public Worship Act, which suppressed freedom of conscience in order to create “unity” for the Anglican Church, yet without allowing the working out of contradictions.

The final chapter of *Mehalah* overflows with marriage imagery. Interspersed throughout Elijah's transport of *Mehalah* to their deaths are the sounds of wedding bells in West Mersea and happy scenes of the wedding celebration. On the punt Elijah speaks of the bells:

“Are you waking. Glory?” he asked. “Hark, hark! the marriage bells are ringing, ringing, ringing, for you and me. Now Glory! now only is our marriage! now only, locked together, shall we find rest.”

He took the iron chain, and wound it round her and him, tying them together tight, and then he fastened the padlock and flung the key into the sea.

“Once I turned the key in the lock carelessly, and he who was bound by this chain escaped. I have fastened it firmly now, it will not fall apart for all eternity. Now Glory! Now we are bound together for everlasting.” (*Mehalah* 305)

We hear in Elijah's words a madness caused by his frustrated attempts and failures at accomplishing conciliation—the madness that threatens someone who holds devotedly to an ideal. His failures have led him to a mad, desperate type of marriage

which is no marriage at all. As I mentioned before, perhaps Baring-Gould here is expressing his frustration over his failures of “conciliation” at East Mersea.

Nonetheless, Elijah’s act shows that the any forced “conciliations” involving negation are destructive and counter-productive.

Though Mehalah desires freedom, she eventually chooses to stay at restrictive Red Hall, and in the end she turns from George to Elijah, an action which suggests a willingness to contend with restriction. Elijah becomes influenced by the presence of Mehalah, but in the end he chooses to annul Mehalah’s free-will. Elijah rejects freedom even as Mehalah turns toward restriction. He violently forces their “true” marriage, as he suggested earlier during an angry diatribe against Mehalah:

“O God!” he burst forth in agony, “why did I not take you in my arms when the Ray house was burning, and spring with you into the flames and hold you there in the yellow wavering tongue of fire, till we melted into one lump? Then we should both have been at peace now, both in one, and happy in our unity.” (*Mehalah* 283)

The tragedy of *Mehalah* is one of negation. Elijah feels that he must force conciliation, and by doing so he cancels the “true” marriage anticipated by the reader. The ending is obviously unsatisfactory for someone who is emotionally invested in the lives of the characters, and it is likewise unsatisfactory as a synthesis, according to both Baring-Gould and Elijah’s philosophies on conciliation. A proper conciliation is not an overwhelming of one over another or a destruction of one by another, but a merger of both in the fullness of their oppositeness. The *true* conciliation anticipated would involve the full participation of each side of the opposition. Elijah makes conciliation into an impoverishing, destructive act, empty and tragic in the loss of Mehalah’s involvement.

A Propelling Failure

I will now consider how the ending to *Mehalah* might be appropriate for the philosophy of *Origin* despite the fact that it depicts a false conciliation.

Elijah pursues the spiritual “glory” of his union with Mehalah, yet in his mad desire for a perfect spiritual union he disregards their physical existence:

Glory! we were created for each other, but a perverse fortune has separated your heart from mine here. We shall meet and unite in another world. We must do so, we were born for each other.” (*Mehalah* 305)

In *Origin* Baring-Gould calls evil “the rejection of the infinite for the finite” (Part II, 38); Elijah’s evil act is rather a rejection of the finite for the infinite. Nonetheless, the result is the same: “the sentiment of the indefinite loses its character”—that is, the contradictory human state necessary for human development is lost. The experience of the absolute for a subjective being is some form of death.

Elijah gives absolute restriction to Mehalah on the “infinite” ocean with which she associates freedom, but to the subjective perspective the absolutes of freedom and restriction are the same. The ocean at the ending is an oppositely presented Grimshoe. Grimshoe is a ship-burial, underground, cut off from water and the horizon.

The beginning of the novel presents the setting of a land and sea threshold fraught with antagonism. The closing line of the novel, also a description of setting, presents the negation of land, a picture of only water and a silencing of the opening antagonism: “The bells pealed over the rolling sea—no boat was on it, only a sea-mew skimming and crying” (*Mehalah* 306). The threshold conflict has ended

tragically in the destruction of the threshold. Both Grimshoe and the closing, “absolute” setting present the horrors of the absolute.

In *Origin*, the point on which Baring-Gould expressly parts with Hegel is Hegel’s claim to have discovered Absolute Knowledge—that is, the ultimate conciliation of contradictions via his philosophy. Baring-Gould argues that man works through contradictions to move closer to God and the infinite, but that this work is never ending. He states that the Catholic Church does not have an absolute understanding of conciliation, but rather works through the mystery of the Incarnation, the perfect marriage of all contradictions. Thus the Church remains on the contradictory point between the finite and the infinite, sustaining a type of subjective-threshold and “Gothic” experience. Perhaps Elijah’s “absolute” marriage at the end of *Mehalah* is an expression of this point on which Baring-Gould’s chiefly disagreed with Hegel.

Though the conclusion of *Mehalah* depicts a false conciliation of the absolute, reminders of contradiction are maintained throughout the conclusion.

Life was beginning to return to Mehalah, but she neither saw nor knew aught. Her eyes were open and turned seaward, to the far away horizon, and Elijah relaxed his hold one instant. “Elijah!” she suddenly exclaimed, “How cold!”
 “Glory! Glory! It is fire! We are one!” (*Mehalah* 306)

The final chapter is structured along contradiction. In the final exchange of Mehalah and Elijah the single experience of their drowning is described by Mehalah as “cold” and by Elijah as “fire,” whereupon Elijah declares that the two speakers are “one.” Also, Elijah has wrapped chains around himself and Mehalah, while Mehalah gazes confusedly towards the horizon of freedom and development.

The ending is a culmination of the botched marriage theme, but it is not merely a failure of marriage, but also, appropriately for the Gothic threshold, a failure placed in stark contrast with our expectations which are joined with the simultaneous happy wedding at West Mersea. The West Mersea wedding becomes an *ideal* marriage as a romantically dim event at a distance from the tragic scene—very different from the fussily detailed description of Virley Church. The two marriages, a happy wedding and a macabre marriage parody, are set in the direct, stark contrast of immediate death against hopes for long life and happiness:

“Glory!” he cried, and he folded her to his heart, and fastened his lips fiercely, ravenously to hers.

He felt her heart throb, faintly indeed, but really.

Merrily pealed the musical bells. Cans of ale had been supplied the ringers, and they dashed the ropes about in a fever of intoxication and sympathy. Joy to the wedded pair! Long life and close union and happiness without end! The toppers at the Leather Bottle brimmed their pewter mugs and drank the toast with three cheers.

The water boiled up, through the plughole, and the boat sank deeper. (*Mehalah* 306)

Taking place on the novel’s threshold structure, this contrast is also a merger of the tragic failure against the ideal, creating as an incongruous whole a failure which is more than failure and a completeness which is less than completeness; a Janus-view of “becoming” between the opposites which creates a complex picture of failure: a “propelling” failure, moving in some trajectory without achieving completion.

The never-ending conciliatory development described by Baring-Gould in *Origin* necessarily involves a propelling failure in which a continual “falling short” occurs, since such development can never reach a completed state. Because of the necessary disappointment of a mortal life, one looks beyond, and to the next life, like

Mehalah looking towards the horizon, her aspiration and hope, at the time of her death.

In his *Court Royal* preface, Baring-Gould writes that the purpose of his novel *John Herring* was to show how an individual can develop only through mistakes.

The “deeper” purpose of the novel, he states

was to show how a noble character can only be formed which has before it an ideal, and that the ideal which elevates character is ever, and ever must be, unattainable. The man without an ideal sinks; the man with one rises; but in so rising passes through agonies. This life is his purgatory. Only the man without an ideal is happy—brutally happy. (vi)

This description of life as purgatory resonates with Mehalah’s suffering and death; she is a “noble character” with an unattainable ideal. Though she literally “sinks” at the end, she dies with her eyes toward the ideal, as if still searching in anticipation.

Failure allows contradiction to be maintained, as it could be said to be maintained at the failed marriage at the ending of *Mehalah*. The novel has instilled in the reader a desire for the marriage of Elijah and Mehalah which carries on even beyond the marring of this marriage. The reader’s desire for conciliation is made all the more intense in juxtaposition with its loss. Loss follows anticipation, and the tragedy leaves the reader at a threshold of the two, resembling Mehalah’s painful straining between the given and the ideal.

The ending is challenging, not satisfying. Baring-Gould is presenting the idea of the incomplete marriage, not only incomplete as a misguided “absolute” marriage, but also suggesting a work to be done, and, according to his philosophy, *always* to be done. The novel, and particularly the final chapter, strongly and continually *suggests* conciliation, yet without achieving it. In the last pages of *Origin*, Baring-Gould expresses hope for Catholic Christianity in the apparent tragedy of modern schisms.

That some great religious crisis is at hand, few can doubt who note the aspect of the sky. That belief in the Incarnation, and in the catena of dogmas depending upon it, will be rooted out by any amount of corrosive criticism, *is an impossibility*, for that doctrine and all its consequences are impetrated by the nature of man. (Part II, 387-9)

Perhaps the propelling failure in *Mehalah* reflects Baring-Gould's hope within the difficulties of the Church, amidst its low point of anti-Catholic action and botched conciliation, and also his hope for Beatrice in the midst of his suffering over her unexpected death. A happy conclusion would not have spoken so directly to hope amidst great loss. By having Mehalah die, Baring-Gould formed the novel into a counterpart for his own loss, a bespoke channel for his grief and a mirroring support for the understanding of his loss, accommodating both the harrowing, immediate tragedy of his daughter's death, and his related hopes and ideals

Support for this idea of Mehalah's death as some kind of propelling failure comes from Baring-Gould's hagiography *The Lives of the Saints*. Given that the writing of *Mehalah* followed not only ten years in Mersea, but also several years in Mersea writing on 3,600 saints, one might justly consider whether Mehalah might have been developed in the mold of a saint and martyr. Baring-Gould's pen certainly must have been shaped by his staggering work in researching and writing on the thousands of saints. Mehalah is not depicted as a Christian or as having any developed theology in the novel, but she is a mystic, and she struggles heroically against tremendous odds towards a spiritual ideal of freedom epitomized in the horizon.

In the preface to *The Lives of the Saints*, Baring-Gould describes his storyteller's approach to writing his hagiography:

...it is the little details of a man's life that give it character. People forget the age and parentage of S. Gertrude, but they remember the mouse running up her staff. (viii)

Likewise, we remember Mehalah with her red cap and blue sweater, in her struggles with Elijah, and with her eye turned in death towards the horizon. In working through the loss of his child, Mehalah may have become for Baring-Gould the saint and martyr of “unrealized potential” and “the ever-distant ideal.” Thus she is depicted throughout the novel as feeling drawn towards a vague spiritual goal which she does not achieve. In her longing she can be seen to look past death towards a new life. Such a figure would certainly have connected with the regret that Baring-Gould felt both for his daughter and his Church.

Later in the preface, Baring-Gould states his reason for writing such a work as

The Lives of the Saints:

The Saints are the elect children of the spouse of Christ, the precious fruit of her body; they are her crown of glory. And when these dear children quit her to reap their eternal reward, the mother retains precious memorials of them, and holds up their example to her other children to encourage them to follow their glorious traces. (xix)

Wawman states that the “erection of the monument to Beatrice in St Peter's Church, Lewtrenchard can be seen as part of the process of grief, as can the commissioning of the painting of *The Viaticum to the Dying* by Edouard Tyck of Antwerp.” (236) Perhaps *Mehalah*, the story of an exceptional young woman's brief life and tragic death, was part of this grieving process—a final, perhaps unconscious, monument to Beatrice.

Origin and Mehalah

In specializing restriction over freedom, Elijah also specializes conciliation over diversity. Do we see within *Mehalah* a split of the author? A division of the author's self? Is Baring-Gould viewing his own passionate pursuit of conciliation outside of himself, from the perspective of Mehalah—the theoretical, primitive, developing religionist who is the subject of his anthropological *Origin*? Elijah holds the developed theory and Mehalah is the subject of that theory, and Baring-Gould, in writing *Mehalah*, gave play to the tension between theory and reality, and a theorist and his real subject. Ten years after writing *Origin*, he created a fictional space for the theorist and his subject to interact.

I have discussed how the shocking ending could refer to the frustration Baring-Gould felt in the *application* of his theory. I have also considered how it could reflect the necessary incompleteness inherent in his theory. Furthermore, the ending could depict the necessarily contradictory nature of theory itself: the *truth* of the theory along with the *truth* of the reality with which it attempts to relate, and the tension existing between them.

As Elijah commits his horrible act, we can imagine what *might* have been as we read what *does* occur. This threshold is the meeting place between a grand theory and the “becoming” world that the theory stands against—thus, the meeting place between Elijah's “complete” understanding and Mehalah's freedom. And it is the reader who stands at this threshold and experiences the tension between the two.

The Gothic “space” of *Mehalah* is a threshold space, allowing an exploration of the fullness of the self within contradictions. Baring-Gould saw this sort of

threshold experience as becoming more diminished in his day and likely more so in the future. I stated in the Introduction that the fears of *Origin* can be perceived dimly in the Gothic shadows of *Mehalah*. Ultimately, these are not fears directed towards the Gothic threshold, but fears of that threshold's collapse in modernity.

Chapter Four

Margery of Quether and the Gothic Land Question

In 1881, the year following the publication of *Mehalah*, Baring-Gould's uncle, the rector at Lew Trenchard, died. In June of the same year Baring-Gould and his family left Essex for Lew Trenchard. Baring-Gould was finally going home. He soon appointed himself to the living of Lew Trenchard parish and at long last became the squire and parson, the “squarson,” of Lew Trenchard. The manor house was still under lease and money was scarce, so the family took up residence in the rectory.

Once reasonably settled (though work on his family home and family church never really ended), Baring-Gould produced a novella worthy of discussion. *Margery of Quether* was first published in two parts in the *Cornhill Magazine* (April and May 1884).¹ Appropriately, it concerns ancestral land and takes place around Baring-Gould's day in an area very near Lew Trenchard. In my discussion of *Mehalah* I focused more on Baring-Gould's role as an Anglo-Catholic parson; in this study of *Margery of Quether* I will consider more his role as a land owner and squire.

Margery is quite removed in tenor from the tragic *Mehalah*. Though a vampire tale and tonally ambivalent, it is generally satirical. The character Mehalah is never ridiculous, while *Margery*'s central character almost always is.

¹ *Cornhill Magazine*. New Series, Vol. 2, (April 1884): 337-360, (May 1884): 466-485. For my text I will be using the version found in the later collection *Margery of Quether, and Other Stories*. London: Methuen & Co, 1891.

Mister or Esquire?

THIS is written by my own hand, entirely unassisted. I am George Rosedhu, of Foggaton, in the parish of Lamerton, and in the county of Devon. Whether to write myself Mister or Esquire, I do not know.

So begins Baring-Gould's *Margery of Quether*, a vampire tale centered on its narrator, a Devon yeoman named George Rosedhu. George begins his tale by introducing himself as liminal—that is, on a threshold.² George, a non-gentry landowner, is unsure of whether to present himself to his reader as “Mister or Esquire”; he is titled Esquire by those who desire favors and Mister by those who do not. George's unstable identity, suggested in this introduction, is a foundational part of both his character and his story.

On the subject of his land, George speaks with more assurance, emphasizing the permanence of his family property throughout the centuries:

I have held my acres for five hundred years—that is, my family the Rosedhus have, in direct lineal descent, always in the male line, and I intend, in like manner, to hand it on, neither impaired nor enlarged, to my own son, when I get one, which I am sure of, as the Rosedhus always have had male issue. (1)

Notice how George is eager to integrate himself, via his land, within the family line: “I have held [...] that is, my family the Rosedhus...” George turns to land and tradition to buttress his self-definition. He is a Rosedhu; it follows that his life will duplicate and perpetuate an ancient and established pattern fixed on the family land.

Yet George presents his land-based security only to immediately question it; an active and looming nebula of modern change threatens to upset his ancestral confidence:

² *Limen* is Latin for “threshold.” A related word is *subliminal*, “below the threshold.” Other terms similar in concept to *liminal* are “in between,” and “neither this nor that.”

But what with Nihilism, and Communism, and Tenant-right, and Agricultural Holdings legislation, threatened by Radicals and Socialists, there is no knowing where a man with ancestral acres stands, and, in the general topsy-turvyism into which we are plunging—God bless me !—I may be driven, heaven preserve me, to have only female issue. There is no knowing to what we landed proprietors are coming. (1-2)

George feels that his ancestral land is threatened by recent political action by Gladstone and the Liberals, whose legislative aims he sees as a threat to the landowner's holdings. For instance, "Agricultural Holdings legislation" had the expressed aim of more clearly detailing the relationship between landlord and tenant, with the concurrent aim of making dealings between the two parties fair, often to the advantage of the tenant. Thus the legislation's main goal, particularly as the nineteenth century rolled to a close, was to guarantee "Tenant-right."

George's curious, foreshadowing non sequitur, that he "may be driven," opposed to family tradition, "to have only female issue" (2), indicates his fear that a fearfully revolutionary surge of change could completely overturn the secure inheritance traditions of the Rosedhu house. For George, land is a security of the past that is destabilized by modernity. The fitting name of the Rosedhu estate, Foggaton, suggests the uncertainty with which George is at times forced to regard its future.³

The political atmosphere which has excited and upset George is the activity of Land Law reform. The Land Laws, a part of Britain's legal system since feudal times, accommodated the establishment of entail (also known as strict settlement).

The entail of the Land Laws was the arrangement of the inheritance of landed estates for the purpose of preserving the family's ownership of the full estate. Entail

³ The name for George's property in the original *Cornhill Magazine* publication is Brinsabatch, an actual farm in the story's West Dartmoor setting on which the Rosedhu property seems entirely based.

Brinsabatch is still a working farm, matching the description found in *Margery*. The farm's owners have burial rights atop Brentor, the tor mentioned in the story. For whatever reason, Baring-Gould changed the farm's name to the fictional Foggaton by the time of the Methuen publication in 1891. (Had he offended the farm's family by his satirical depiction of George?) I am not aware of any other changes between the texts.

limited the inheriting landowner's power over the land (making him a sort of tenant-for-life) in order to prevent any part of the land from being "alienated" from the family line and name through sale, mortgage, or a fracturing distribution by will.

The entail guaranteed the family's continued ownership of the land by limiting the powers of individual ownership. The landowner was to receive the income of the land, but could not sell or mortgage the land for additional funds (except as allowed by the terms of inheritance). Indeed, many indebted landowners who would have gladly sold or mortgaged some of their land in order to raise needed funds were bound by the stipulations of entail.

Furthermore, the Land Laws made primogeniture standard. In primogeniture, the land is passed down in full to the first-born son. This guarantees that the land will not be divided amongst more than one child.

The dynamics of entail, in which full ownership was repeatedly deferred to future offspring, made it likely that the system would continue perpetually through generations, and that most of English land-holdings would remain in the possession of the gentry and aristocracy. Entail, maintaining as it did the old land balance in England, was "the object of the reformers' wrath" (Spring 41).⁴ Land Law reform was the key battle between reformers and conservatives throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, reformers turned their sights to Land Laws. "With free trade in the products of land established, free trade in land itself seemed the next step" (Spring 43). Though Land Law reform lacked the popular appeal of Corn Law reform, reformers persisted in their new fight.

⁴ Eileen Spring, "Landowners, Lawyers, and Land Law Reform in Nineteenth-Century England," *The American Journal of Legal History*, 21.1 (Jan 1977): 40-59.

The “peak of the campaign” of Land Law reform came in the early 1880s, particularly “in the years 1879 and 1882, the latter being the year when partial reform was won” (Spring 43). The cry to free land from entail had died down “during Disraeli’s 1874 Administration, when there was no prospect of influencing policy, only to re-appear with redoubled vigour towards its close” in 1879 (Thompson 39).⁵ The expansion of the franchise was gradually weakening the power of landowners; in 1880, “for the first time in history, landowners were a minority in the House” (Spring 49).

Furthermore, the New Domesday Book was completed in 1874. As the name suggests, this Domesday Book was a fresh Victorian reckoning of the lay of British land. It revealed that “there were a million landowners in Great Britain” (Spring 50). This high number seemed to support the conservative position that Britain did not need drastic change in land policies. The shocking revelation, however, was that “80 percent of the land of Great Britain was owned by fewer than seven thousand persons.” When faced with such a startling picture of the country, “[e]ven landowners were led to think that an increase in the number of small holders was desirable” (Spring 50). Public sentiment was noticeably shifting in favor of reform.

Amidst all of this frustration for landowners, the Great Depression of agriculture began in the summer of 1879. This depression was caused by poor weather—including a seemingly interminable series of storms—and a deluge of incredibly cheap grain from the “newly opened Canadian and American West” (Spring 51). For landowners, this Great Depression was a sickening blow which

⁵ F.M.L. Thompson, “Land and Politics in England in the Nineteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 15 (1965): 23-44.

dramatically compounded the ever-increasing troubles and anxieties of landowners, while further bolstering the reformers' arguments for the need for change in the British agricultural system.

In the early 1880s, landowners began to realize despairingly that their agricultural difficulties were extending into a lasting depression. While the depression caused more farm bankruptcies in the more farmable south and southeast of England, livestock-centered farms in counties like Devon not only heard reports of farm failure across the country, they also had their own share of difficulties, especially in comparison to the early 1870s, the "last of the good years" (Perry 41).⁶ "Most farmers, dairy-men, graziers, even market gardeners as well as 'high farmers' on traditional arable lines could find something to grumble at: labour costs, margins between store and fast stock prices, or railway rates."

In *Margery of Quether*, Devonshire grazier George Rosedhu gives space in his narrative for some grumbling:

...we are not likely to have seasonable weather so long as this Gladstone-Chamberlain-Radical topsy-turvy Government remain in power. Our sheep get cawed with the wet, the potatoes get the disease, the bullocks get foot-and-mouth complaint, and the rain won't let us farmers get in our harvest. If only we had Beaconsfield back! But there, politics have nothing to do with my story. (16).

George here is most certainly complaining about the first wave of the Great Depression of agriculture. His distress over "this Gladstone-Chamberlain-Radical topsy-turvy Government" and his cry for Beaconsfield's return situate his story sometime after the Liberal parliamentary victory in 1880, when Disraeli (first Earl of Beaconsfield) and the Tories were defeated—or perhaps after the death of Disraeli in

⁶ P.J. Perry, "Where was the 'Great Agricultural Depression'? A Geography of Agricultural Bankruptcy in Late Victorian England and Wales," *Agricultural History Review*, 20 (1972): 30-45.

April 1881. Furthermore the story is very likely to be situated around the passage of the Settled Land Act of 1882 (and of course was submitted for publication after this Act).

Consultation of Baring-Gould's diary gives some slight confirmation of these estimations. Unless written earlier, *Margery* was probably written after the writing of the novel *John Herring* (recorded in Baring-Gould's diary as written from November 1882 to March 1883). If so, *Margery* was written sometime between March and September 1883, because Baring-Gould documents his sale of *Margery* to *Cornhill* in his diary entry of 29 September 1883:

Received for "John Herring" £100. disposed of "Margery of Quether" to Cornhill for £40.
(Wawman 146)

In general, then, we can consider the story contemporaneous with the time in which it was written, taking place sometime in the early 1880s (and before the publication date of mid-1884). This is notable, since so little of Baring-Gould's previous fiction is set in his own time. The story does seem in fact to be directly inspired by the topic of the day, though the references are only occasionally explicit. Baring-Gould chose to narrate his story from the perspective of the landowner somewhat like himself—though George is a Yeoman while Baring-Gould was gentry, and George supports Disraeli while Baring-Gould supported Gladstone. For the alarmed conservative landlord like George Rosedhu, the strength of the reform movement was rising at a nightmarish rate.

The time of 1880-84, wherein lies the chronological setting of *Margery of Quether*, was arguably the most intense span of Land Law reform. The growing sense of urgency relating to the Land Question led to a surge of texts urging for

reform. These works were written with “the widening franchise in mind,” endeavoring “to make the laws of real property intelligible to common men”:

The first of the series, Joseph Kay’s *Free Trade in Land*, appeared in 1879. In 1880 there followed Arthur Arnold’s *Free Land*, George Shaw Lefevre’s *Freedom of Land*, and Osborne Morgan’s *Land Law Reform in England*. In 1881 the best known of the lot appeared. George Brodrick’s *English Land and English Landlords*. We may also include in this series Frederick Pollock’s *The Land Laws*, which first appeared in 1883. This work is largely a history of the development of the laws, but it is designed for the intelligent layman and bears a strong sense of reform. (Spring 51-2).

Strange as it seems, *Margery of Quether* was another in this series—though, as I will argue, Baring-Gould’s Gothic story contains not only support of reform in its satire of the conservative landowner, but also a vivid illustration of the landowner’s fears. Considering how often George rails against the new Liberal administration (six times in sixty-two pages), we must mistrust his claim that politics have nothing to do with his story. *Margery of Quether* is, in fact, a Gothic story about the Land Law debate—and Baring-Gould handles the subject masterfully, while giving it intriguing development, as I will show.

Thompson argues that “the English Land Question, and the lack of dramatic reforms stemming from this question” —though seldom discussed in either historical analysis or fiction—

are both central to an understanding of nineteenth-century political history. [...] Power, at the beginning of the industrial period, rested by and large with the landed classes. There it remained far into the rise of modern society, and it was a prime purpose of those outside the charmed circles to bring this state of affairs to an end. One way of achieving this purpose was to seek to dismantle the social system of landed estates on which the power and influence of the landed classes was based, and the various proposals which at different times formed the favoured answers to the land question formed the necessary instrument. Hence the passions aroused by proposals which in themselves often appeared to be of small import and negligible application. (23-24)

Land Laws, while relatively unimportant in themselves, became a symbol of the greater conflict between the old structures of England and the many proposed new

structures. Spring asserts that entail was “undoubtedly a useful aristocratic device”, but its annulment would not topple the landed estate system, “though both landowners and reformers often talked as if it would have” (59, footnote 64). Land laws were, for both sides, an important symbol within the realm of philosophies. Thus dichotomies related to the old and new ways were instantly drawn into the Land Law debate, as with Gothic fiction. George Rosedhu’s story is not only about politics, it is about a practical and symbolic centerpiece of nineteenth-century politics and culture.

The necessity of maintaining the British land structure as it was (and had been for centuries) was the main argument of the Tories; otherwise, they argued, everything would fall apart. Throughout the 1850s and ‘60s, a proposed bill for abolishing primogeniture was “denounced in lurid terms by all the leading defenders of the established order”:

Sir Frederic Thesiger knew that a measure for the compulsory division of all estates must follow. Disraeli saw that the Bill would ‘interfere with a principle upon which the whole of our social system was established’, claiming that the entire system rested on the difference between real and personal property, and that liberty ‘was dependent on the tenure of land in this country’. Sir Richard Bethell felt that ‘the foundation on which the order of estates was fixed would fall’, and with it would go the constitution.

[...]

While Palmerston, that epitome of the age, ‘objected to the Bill on every possible ground’. It was at variance with the habits, customs and feelings of the people of the country; and it was incompatible with the maintenance of a constitutional monarchy because that required the existence of a landed aristocracy. (Thompson 28-9)

A landed class, they maintained, was an essential presence in the balance of power, a solid rock of constancy necessary for holding society together.

With great emotion George connects his personal uncertainty as a landowner with “the general topsy-turvyism” (2) of the *fin de siècle* (the close of the nineteenth century). His fears relate not only to land legislation, but also to the general sense of

uncertainty. To Nihilism, Communism, etc George adds a word apparently of his own coinage, “topsy-turvyism,” which refers to change which turns the world upside-down, reversing its normal configuration. For many the end of the nineteenth century was a time of uncertainty brought on by the expectation of unwanted, seemingly inevitable change, and landowners like George were likely to feel this change most pointedly in land legislation. Many foundational aspects of an individual’s life—political, philosophical, religious, social, etc—were in upheaval, and these upheavals were often seen as connected within a large, shadowy conglomerate of impending anarchy. The old, given way of life was rapidly breaking up, and Britain was on an uncertain threshold between the old and new.

Conversely for others, it was a time of exciting and necessary change—pressing into a new and better world. Eager reformers abounded, along with those who desired a complete reversal of things.

In a shifting world, George is unsure of where he stands, and he struggles to define himself. He clings to the supposed stability of his ancestral ties above all things, and thus his values are firmly intertwined with the past. In his role as a landowner he displays confidence, but sudden turns of defensive insecurity mock that confidence. For instance, though he apologizes for his rude writing style, he quickly turns the blame onto “the present taste,” being “so vitiated by slipshod English and effeminacy of writing, that the modern reader of periodicals may not appreciate [his] composition as it deserves” (2). This give and take of confidence and insecurity, related respectively to the past and present, is another display of the liminality that colors George’s narrative style throughout; and in general, George’s liminality is

caused by his forced stance between the treasured past and relentlessly intrusive modernity. Conservative George would seem to prefer living in the past, in the place of one of his ancestors, but he is forced to live in his own day, which he views, rightly or wrongly, as particularly unstable. So George is enduringly liminal, completely invested in the past, yet forced to live, grumbling, in a modern world where those old things are either crumbling or being demolished and replaced.

Adjacent to Foggaton is a tor, a weathered outcrop of exposed volcanic rock, named Brentor (or Brent Tor)—reaching 1,096 feet above sea level. Tors are a relatively common feature of Dartmoor, and Brentor stands on Dartmoor's western border. This picturesque tor is viewable for miles, including from Baring-Gould's landed estate Lew Trenchard (five or so miles away) and even so far as Plymouth sound.

High on this tor, and adding to its charm, is perched the small, dilapidated, thirteenth-century church where George attends services, St. Michael de Rupe (of the Rock). Concerning one of many legends concerning the church's construction, a supernatural story involving St. Michael and the devil, George is typically liminal: he does not claim that it is true, though he does not deny it (4). He simply states that *empirically*, in accordance with the legend, horn marks may be found on a nearby stone.

George's description of the legend is awkward. Here once again we find a subtle indication of George's forced stance between two worlds. He maintains a detached, scientific stance while not cutting himself completely off from the supernatural explanations of the traditional story. George is aware of modern

attitudes and is pressured by them—though he partially resists this pressure, as he made clear when speaking of his writing style. So while being intrigued by the romantic, supernatural explanation found in folklore, George adopts, to a certain extent, the empirical mindset of the modern, “adult” Victorian—as opposed to the more “childish” thinking of the past (over time man has “come of age”). George continues in the same tone: “It is said also that there is a depression caused by the thumb of St. Michael. I have looked at it carefully, but I express no opinion thereon—that may have been caused by the weather” (4).

George’s affection for the medieval church is not so ambivalent; he firmly opposed an architect hired by the Duke of Bedford who sought to tear it down and build “a sort of Norman Gothic cathedral” in its place (the ancient to be replaced by mock-ancient). As a result, the church was saved; but, being an anachronism treasured by only a few, it is neglected and falling into disrepair (18). George laments the rotting “sacred edifice” (18), a bastion of the past which still stands yet is slowly crumbling.⁷

George’s discussion moves from the church to church-going, noting that the local flock’s motivation for church attendance on Brentor is liminal: piety and services may be the nominal reasons, but people really “go for the romp”—the in-between walk to and from the isolated church—a time for courtship and gossip (5).

George interrupts himself to say that all this information on church-going is “neither

⁷ In 1889, a few years after *Margery of Quether*’s publication, the Duke of Bedford gave £728 for the ramshackle chapel’s restoration. The Duke, mentioned twice in the story, owned great swaths of land in the region. Spring mentions him in her study of the Land Laws:

“Between 1909 and 1912 the Duke of Bedford put half his great ducal estates on the auction block. Many landowners were to follow his example, selling all or large parts of their estates, and by 1921 over one quarter of English land had changed hands. In the phrase of the day, what had begun was ‘the break-up of the estate system’: the disintegration of that aristocratic system of landholding that had characterized England for centuries.” (40)

here nor there,” a liminal digression. He then reverses his opinion in the very next sentence, stating defensively that

it is not a digression either; it may seem so to my readers, but I know what I am about, and as my troubles came of church-going, what I have said is not so much out of the way as some superficial and inconsiderate readers may have supposed. (5-6)

Indeed, “digressions” (such as the political ones) *are* the focus of the story, the shifting liminality of George and his narrative being the recurring theme. George could hardly become more liminal without becoming incomprehensible.

Having established at this point this story’s political background and its relation to this story’s narrator, I will now discuss how George and his family tradition are affected by his interaction with two very different women, one who is a vampire.

The Rosedhu system

Twenty-three-year-old George maintains a somewhat crotchety outlook in order to combat encroaching modernity, and this attitude is very evident in his marriage plans. He follows the sensible and ancient “Rosedhu system,” fending off marriage until age fifty, ensuring him only one male heir so as not to disturb the integrity of just-so Foggaton (10). A suitable marriage candidate has already been selected, Margaret Palmer of Quether (another estate name possibly suggesting uncertainty, *quether* being a Middle-English word meaning “whether”)⁸. She is the eldest daughter of the yeoman Farmer Palmer, very pretty, and hopefully will remain so for the next twenty-seven years.

⁸ The actual hamlet in the West Dartmoor area is called Quither, not Quether.

The ridiculous Rosedhu system is the story's pointed satire against entail, and a caricature of the necessities of entail taken to extremes. The Rosedhu system mocks the awkward artificiality of primogeniture and the debilitating obsession over preserving land.

George and Margaret enjoy their church walks to Brentor, he being sure to lend a hand over rough terrain and share an umbrella when needed. After one church service, the wooing George leads Margaret behind the church to a ledge under the pretense of a history lesson about distant Kit Hill. As they stand on the ledge, the landscape below is engulfed in an ominous cloud: as George says, "The effect was strange; it was as though we were insulated on a little rock in a vast ocean that had no bounds" (8). Earlier in the text, George brashly assures his reader that he is "a practical man with a place in the world," and that when he is gone, "there will be a hole which will be felt, just as when a molar is removed from the jaw" (2). Standing in a boundless fog is a truer picture of the lord of Foggaton's uncertain place in his world.⁹

Seeing only romance in the situation, Margaret says, "We two seem to be alone in a little world to ourselves" (8). George responds in dazed, absentminded honesty that it is a "preciously dull world and dreary outlook." George likely feels a weariness of anxiety in both carrying on the Rosedhu system and guarding it against disturbance—"I was the single thread on which the possible Rosedhu posterity depended," he says (42). The landlord could easily feel lord of a legacy—and even a life—always deferred, out of reach.

⁹ This scene brings to mind Caspar David Friedrich's "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog" (1818), a painting which could be interpreted variously. For instance, one might argue it as depicting the sublime, or, alternately, an individual's confidence or dread in relation to the world.

Of course George's assessment of the scene offends Margaret and she leaves directly. While George detests the ambiguity of modernity, his estimation of Margaret's reaction once again reveals a predilection for his own kind of liminality: Margaret's "little outburst of temper was distasteful" to him, for "it showed an undue precipitancy, an eagerness to drive matters to a conclusion, which repelled [him]" (9). This statement reveals (as might be expected) a contradiction within George. His chief desire is concluded, fixed stability, yet he must regulate movement towards this goal. This is because a certain kind of liminality is found in the mechanics of the Rosedhu family tradition. The Rosedhu system of marriage is a system of sustaining the liminal courtship, which George describes as "the happiest time of life" (10). Once the couple reconciles, George makes "as near a declaration as ever a man did without actually falling over the edge into matrimony" (10). He is extremely adept at walking a tight-rope between absolute definitions (in this case, between separation from Margaret and solid commitment to her).

Nonetheless, the Rosedhu system, despite the importance of the liminal courtship, is ultimately non-liminal in the extreme: the strict system, the aim of which is to maintain an exact repetition of the Rosedhu heir and his land, allows for no deviation. The system's liminality is then actually encased within a set and rigid model. A change which actually threatens the sameness of this system, like "Gladstone topsy-turvyism," or an overanxious bride-to-be, is an evil to be rejected. George likes to have "the even tenor of neither [his] agricultural nor [his] matrimonial pursuits disturbed" (9). He is a defender of the status quo—a status quo that is constantly under threat.

A Little Quest into Dartmoor

On the Christmas Eve following the lovers' tiff and later reconciliation, George has agreed to ring the bells of the church on Brentor at midnight. He again displays his fondness for the past by carrying on his little quest a light source that he is careful to distinguish as a *lanthorn* (with horn sides, he explains, rather than the glass ones of the more modern lantern) (16). By the light of his old-fashioned apparatus, George sees a nighttime world that is changed and eerie—a world of the past, full of mystery and the supernatural. As he approaches the church, which is on the border of wild and haunted Dartmoor, he imagines that any nearby travelers might interpret his bobbing light as “Jack o’ Lanthorn” or a “witches’ frolic” (17). George feels that he is crossing into the “Otherworld” of the fantastic. As in the archetypal quest, the hero is entering a strange world, and will return with something magical from that world to bring back to his home world.

Reaching the church, George finds that the belfry is in a bad state, with several beams and boards recently fallen. He clears some of the rubble and begins the bell-ringing.

When George first sees Margery descending from the tenor bell, fear overwhelms him. She is like a grotesque mixture of extreme youth and extreme age: wizened to the size of an infant yet with a hideous complexion of aged leather. When discussing his reaction to seeing Margery, George again exhibits a strange liminal self.

I never have believed in the supernatural. I do not believe in it now. Ghosts, goblins, and pixies are the creations of fevered imaginations and illiterate ignorance. It puts me out of patience to hear people, who ought to know better, speak of such things. I did not for a moment, therefore, suppose that the object before me was a denizen of another world. As far as I can recollect and analyse my sensations at the time, I should say that blank amazement

prevailed, attended by a dominating desire to be outside the church and careering down the flank of the hill in the direction of Foggaton. I had no theory as to what the thing was; indeed the inclination to theorise was far from me. (21)

George adopts scientific language to analyze the situation, even analyzing *himself* scientifically, while coolly stating that no theorizing was done nor even possible by this self in the midst of this experience—presenting two versions of himself, as rational and otherwise. The intensely subjective experience interrupts scientific thought. The Gothic can be thought of as a “grotesque” mixture of the rational and non-rational, and here the rational and non-rational are considered simultaneously. That Rosedhu would not “believe in [the supernatural] now” after his experience with Margery is bizarre; it is also at odds with other points of his own narrative. Here the doggedly rational mind is lightly mocked just as in other places in the narrative the fantastic “Gothic” experience is presented satirically.

George eventually learns that Margery is a wretched three-hundred-years old, having prayed for eternal life but, alas, not eternal youth. As a consequence, she is cursed with a body that grows ever older and more decrepit, yet cannot die. By this time she can barely see or hear. She has brittle skin and bones. Lately, for protective solitude, she has taken to attaching herself to the church beams with her one remaining tooth and long fingernails, but the unstable old church, which has also endured the hostilities of time, threatens her with broken bones that can no longer heal.

George discovers that Margery is an ancestor of his sweetheart Margaret. This causes some confusion, since the old woman, in her younger days, had courted one of George’s ancestors who shared *his* name. She does, in fact, mistake George

for his Rosedhu ancestor, and chastens him for abandoning her for an older, wealthier woman with land. She tells him, it was “a mistake, a gashly [ghastly?] error,” pointing out the “cruel, sour life” that resulted for George’s ancestor (26). George becomes so deeply affected by her story that fear gives way to sympathy and he resolves to take Margery home for a warm fire and a Christmas meal. As he picks up her tiny body, she instinctually latches on with tooth and nail tightly, as if George were a beam of the church. He allows this arrangement, and continues back down to Foggaton.

But what triggers this “sudden access of pity” (29), which causes George to show compassion to a monster? Ancestral guilt seems to be part of it, and perhaps George has begun to question the cold and calculating “Rosedhu system.” There is also his instinct for venerating and preserving the decaying yet also stable past.

George sees Margery’s supernatural existence as parallel to his ancient Rosedhu family line:

My ancestor, who had flirted with her, and then jilted her, had lived over two hundred years ago, and she would be alive, drier and more wretched two hundred years hence, when Margaret and I are fallen to dust, and our lineal descendant in the male line is reigning at Foggaton. (29)

Of course, the certainty of this male line has already been questioned, and it is in the strange condition of Margery that George begins to see both a sobering reflection of his own state as a landowner and an alternate form of the stability for which he longs.

Ruins

Having discussed George’s rescue of decaying Margery from the decaying church on Brentor, I will now consider the idea of “ruin” in the cultural context of the

latter half of the nineteenth century. In doing so I will also indicate the connection between the Land Laws and Gothic fiction.

Preservation of the past is naturally associated with the ideas of ruins and decay. Thus the idea of ruin became connected to the aristocracy and, by association, all landed estates. In the context of landed estates, “ruins” had both positive and negative connotations. The aristocracy, new landed gentry, and all status-minded landowners would value ruin for its association with long and continuous properties and family lines; lengthy family lines meant higher status and family importance. As George Rosedhu states, the landed family, confirmed as ancient, is unified with the land, adorning itself with the land’s solidity and permanence. Ruins and weathered buildings would contribute to this picture of long-lasting unification.

Decay could also be associated negatively with the estates, mainly in their contrast with modern counterparts such as the fresh, productive, modern money of industry and trade or the utopian visions of Radicals and socialists. Both the physical properties and the system of settled family estates were gradually falling apart amidst the changing atmosphere of modernity (as George bemoans). The estates were paralyzed in their rigid ways as more flexible, democratic activity swarmed ably about. An empowered workforce, higher wages, less landed power in Parliament, development of new foreign markets, etc—all existed within “the broad trend of English social and political life in the nineteenth century, a trend that was politely but increasingly democratic and that involved step by step a reduction in the power and prestige that attached to land” (Spring 40).

The agricultural production of the landed estates was simply not competitive enough in this modern world. Tied up by entail, without sufficient capital, many landed estates had become run-down and in need of modern agricultural improvements to compete in the modern world, but they became more and more derelict since the landowners did not have enough money to effect the necessary improvements.

As tenants for life they often found inconvenient the system they publicly, and often extravagantly, defended. [...] While the tenant for life was thus rendered incapable of reducing his estate, he was at the same time limited in his capacity to develop it. (Spring 44)

Precisely because of the landed families' desire to preserve the land, and thus to maintain their connection with the land and the past, many landed estates became inefficient and short on capital. Encumbered with debt, these old estates were unable to maintain or build up property. Thus, the estates were falling into a less desired ruination—less desired because it suggested a crumbling, devolving family line rather than a preserved one. Landowners in general worked between the positive and negative sides of “ruin,” attempting to ensure the positive and avoid the negative—though the attempt to ensure the former regularly resulted in the latter.

A conservative desire for more flexibility existed, but, like George and his Rosedhu system, only “so far as was consonant with the main aim of settlement” (Spring 45). Acts passed between 1840 and 1864 “were thus full of provisions guaranteeing the integrity of estates” (Spring 47). In fact, the goal of these conservative amendments to the Land Laws was identical to the original intent of the laws: to maintain the landed estates and the landed aristocracy in the midst of modern difficulties. As with George and his system, liminality was allowed so long as it did not threaten the ultimate goal of conservation.

The Land Laws, originally British common law established in feudal times, were reasserted in the Fines and Recoveries Act 1833—which essentially performed the same function as its common law predecessor. As Spring says, “[s]ettlement was legally anachronistic. It embodied principles – primogeniture and entail – that had grown up in, and logically belonged to, feudal society” (42). William Ewart considered his first Bill for ending primogeniture as “part of a general attack on ‘feudal prejudice and error’” (Thompson 26).

The Land laws were a piece of feudal England living in the nineteenth-century, along with the landowners and landed estates they perpetuated. “English landowners and their peculiar institution” (Spring 51) were anachronisms. The principal shock caused by the New Domesday Book was the collective discovery of just how feudal modern Britain had remained—the discovery of a Gothic threshold between the medieval and modern existing at the heart of Victorian England.

George picks up Margery surrounded by the rubble of the decaying medieval church that he fought to save; these three—the supernaturally aged Margery, the ancient church, and the landowner George—are all connected. Like feudal Land Laws and Margery’s church-home, Margery strangely persists from the past into the present, a decaying remnant of the past shockingly alive in nineteenth-century. Like the Laws, she is an anachronism, weirdly out of place in the modern world. She acts as a living embodiment of these things of the past. Thus George is inclined to care for and protect her.

After the passage of the Improvement of Land Act of 1864, *The Economist* stated that such reform constituted “a confession by the Legislature of the

unsoundness of the principles on which the law of entail and settlement is based and marks the age as a period of transition from feudal to rational principles dealing with land.”¹⁰ The statement “period of transition” is an indication of how the nineteenth century, particularly as it progressed, was understood by some as a threshold time, between two worlds—one of the ancient and one of the modern. (The perception of this transition, however, was at times revised, as indicated by the general shock over the New Domesday Book.)

This transitional scenario, in which the old and new stand side-by-side, forms the threshold structure of Gothic fiction. George Rosedhu’s particular experience of this transitional tension is an attempt to maintain the old while dealing with the necessities of the present—what I have labeled his tightrope experience. One might say that *Margery of Quether* depicts Land Law tensions from the perspective of the landowner, Gothicized, but Land Law debates were Gothic by default—sharing the liminal format and features of the Gothic—and *Margery of Quether* simply focuses on the Gothic nature of Land Law reform.

The positive and negative conceptions of decay in relation to landed estates were a major component of the idea of decay found in Gothic fiction. Like the Gothic, landed estates were associated with the older ways, aristocracy, ruined buildings, and ancient religious practices (including Catholicism). For George Roedhu, his supposedly tottering estate and system of entail ties in seamlessly with a discussion of the crumbling edifice on Brentor and then the crumbling immortal Margery.

¹⁰ *The Economist*, Aug. 4, 1866, quoted by Spring, 48-9

I will now discuss how George is a representative of the landed class and landowner liminality, while Margery is a supernatural embodiment of that liminality. With the aid of George, Margery attempts a Gothic invasion, as the empowered past returning into the modern world.

Cybele Myth

Right before his encounter with Margery of Quether, George rings the “cock,” a bell with “a curious Latin inscription on it, which begins, ‘*Gallus vocor . . .*’” (20). These words translate, “I am called the cock” or “rooster.” The actual St. Michael’s on Brentor does in fact have two fourteenth- or fifteenth-century bells with the inscription “*Gallus vocor ego, solus per omne sono*” (I am called the cock, and I alone sound above all).

Why does Baring-Gould include this out-of-the-way detail? He would often decorate his stories with bits of local information he found interesting (and often long digressions on such parenthetical topics).¹¹ Within the context of *Margery of Quether*, a direct implication of the inscription is that George is a Rosedhu rooster, in that the “Rosedhu system” of entail gives him no higher purpose than the straightforward, farm-animal-like role of continuing the line of Rosedhu yeomen.

The term *gallus* also refers to the emasculated priests of the Phrygian goddess Cybele. The possibility that Gallus could refer to this fertility cult and their fertility

¹¹ George Rosedhu gives us a humorously ironic digression on this very subject: “Never before have I taken in hand the tools of literature, and yet, I venture to say that well! there are idiots in the world who don’t know the qualities of a cow, and to whom a sample of wheat is submitted in vain. Such persons are welcome to form what opinion they like of my literary style. Their opinion is of no value whatever to me. There is no veneer in my work, it is sterling. There is no padding, as it is called...” (38).

In this digression we find the picture of a landowner transmuting his thoughts and anxieties “freshly” into literary form, which indeed is the tone throughout the story.

rites is intriguing, especially since George is so concerned with his land and its fertility.

This fertility cult was based on the myth of Cybele and Attis. There are many variants of this myth, but a few fundamental components relating to the rituals of the cult are generally consistent: Through a series of strange impregnations involving gods, hermaphrodites, and trees, Attis is born. He grows up exceedingly handsome, so much so that his grandmother, the goddess Cybele, falls in love with him. He, however, loves another, so the jealous Cybele causes him to go insane. In his madness, he castrates himself and dies beneath a pine tree. Cybele regrets her action, and Attis is resurrected and elevated to the spiritual plane.

During initiation, the priests of Cybele would sometimes castrate themselves in imitation of Attis, then dress in the garments of a woman. Once a year, on the Day of Blood, the priests would work themselves into a frenzy, and then cut their bodies, splattering the blood on an altar and an effigy of Attis tied to a sacred pine tree. Their blood would assist the dead body of Attis in its resurrection. After a time of reflection, the priests would celebrate the resurrection of Attis, which insured a plentiful crop. Even more important, Attis' resurrection was a promise that his disciples would also be resurrected to eternal life.

The question arises whether Baring-Gould even knew of the Gallus when writing *Margery*, and, if so, whether this knowledge had any influence on his story. Perhaps not. Baring-Gould was certainly interested, however, in anthropology and religious development. The definitive Victorian text on fertility cults, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which discusses the practices of the Gallus cult, would be published a

few years later in 1890. Articles and books on the subject may have been published earlier.¹²

Regardless, the possible connection has caused me to consider many details in *Margery of Quether* that I might otherwise have overlooked. George does go through an experience in some ways similar to a Gallus-fertility-cult convert, though perhaps simply by virtue of the supernatural and almost religious aspect of his dramatic transformation.

George's own emasculation begins when Margery latches onto him with her one tooth. He first describes her as feeling like "a knapsack slung on the wrong way" and "a tick on a dog," but, upon arriving at Foggaton, he describes himself as "nursing her" (30). After a while, Margery drops on his knees "like a sleeping infant after its meal" (31). Gradually, in the eyes of George, she is reborn as his own. He shortly becomes absolutely maternal, creating a makeshift crib, providing a bottle, and sleeping in his chair so as to attend to Margery should she wake.

The next morning, before leaving for the Christmas service, George has another look at Margery and notes her effect on him: "I felt strangely moved with pity, and with that pity there awoke in me a sort of sense of personal property in old Margery...if any woman had come into my house with her baby in her arms and had asked me to admire it and then looked disparagingly at Margery, I should have hated that woman ever after" (33). By envisioning himself as in opposition to another

¹² It is unclear whether Baring-Gould was likely to have read anything on the Gallus before *Margery of Quether* was written. Baring-Gould's own *Cliff Castles and Cave Dwellings of Europe*, published in 1911, briefly mentions "Attys, the lover of Cybele," and "a festival held in his honour." (London: Seeley & Co, 1911) 265.

mother, George makes clear what the awakened “sense of personal property” is, even if he seems unlikely to admit it directly.

During the church visit, George thinks “far more of old Margery than of young Margaret” (34) and declines the Palmer’s invitation to Christmas dinner. Upon returning home, the strange case of vampirism continues. George leans down to kiss Margery and she instantly drives her tooth into his chest and latches on for another suck. George has no desire to resist or defend himself, and he confesses “a soothing sensation” during the feeding (37). At this point, George is completely devoted to the process; it is “strange” at first, but he “should soon get used to it” (37). He even states that, should the “Radical Gladstone-Chamberlain Government” succeed in robbing Foggaton from him, he could make his living as a nurse (38). Here we find a hint that George’s relationship with Margery might replace his anxiety-ridden role as landowner.

Cybele’s priests, because of their liminal state of gender, were referred to both as *Gallus* and *Galla*, masculine and feminine. In his relationship with Margery, George Rosedhu can be seen as adopting a supernaturally liminal path, further transcending strict classifications to help navigate the rift between past and present. His liminality is exacerbated; he is now both *Gallus* and *Galla*, Rooster and Hen, Mister and Mother. Yet George is enabled through this gender transformation to find constancy in his new connection to Margery as the *Magna Mater*, the goddess of fertility, Cybele. Now a mother himself, George experiences the immediate power in giving life, an action far removed from his calculating yet uncertain brooding over his land and legislation. This new role “call[s] into requisition faculties of the mind and

heart that had not been previously exercised” (32), but, as George recognizes, he adopts the role of mother quite readily.

George has been hitherto self-centered and misogynistic. Perhaps these off-putting qualities, however, emanate from George’s obsession over maintaining the Rosedhu system and the threat of the topsy-turvy climate, which reduce him to slight paranoia. He considers women to be “impatient cattle” because their anxiousness to marry threatens Foggaton (10). (For landowner George, personal breeding must be as meticulously regulated as farm breeding.) Charity is to be avoided because it jeopardizes the social order of master and worker; “The man who is universally respected, and obtains ready attention and exact obedience, is he who cares for nobody but himself” (15). Love and compassion expose the struggling landowner to failure.

The Happy Couple

George finds refuge in the mother-child connection from the “preciously dull world and dreary outlook” that haunted him. He is no longer suspended in a fog-like ambiguity. Like a religious convert, the emasculated George has alternate values, along with alternative concerns that he is empowered to answer. He has a sense of belonging, a place in the world.

Margery releases George from his land anxieties. Lineage is no longer merely about preserving ancestral property; George is now directly involved in the maternal caring for the descendent. In a sense, George himself becomes like land, fertile and giving life to a growing crop, Margery. While describing his bell-ringing adventure,

George makes the statement I quoted earlier in which he blames Liberal legislation for unfavorable changes in the weather. The government may hinder George's agricultural interests, but it cannot disturb his relationship with Margery, for they are a world to themselves, established apart from the harrying system of politics and economics. Also, George is no longer involved in the Rosedhu system of "one male issue," a repeating cycle, perpetuating the identical deficiencies and disconnection he has recently identified in his ancestors and himself. As he predicted, George has been "driven...to have only female issue" (2).

Through the sacrifice of feedings, Margery eventually grows into a beautiful young woman as George shrinks into old age and infirmity: "as Margery cut a tooth I lost one...as her hair grew and darkened, mine came out or turned grey...as her eye cleared, mine became dim, and as her spirits rose, mine became despondent" (39). George realizes that he is dying, and, having no male heir, begins once again to question the future of his land. He brings this question to Margery, saying "What is to become of the Rosedhus? To whom will Foggaton fall? You have drawn all the flush and health out of me and made yourself young at my charge—but I get nothing thereby" (41).

But this is mere maternal complaining (or perhaps a momentary return of his landowner anxiety.) Indeed, George is rewarded for his sacrifice—he has an immortal and stable lineage in Margery. Margery explains that she will marry George and inherit Foggaton when he dies. She will then take suitor after suitor and gradually drain them as well. Through this new and improved "Rosedhu system," Margery offers George the final goal of the emasculated Gallus, the transcendent

fertility of eternal life. George does not consider himself a victim; he feels that he is vicariously receiving immortality, because his essence finds an immortal form in her.

I begrudged her none of her youth and beauty; I took a sort of motherly pride in her growth and the development of her charms, and for precisely the same reasons—they were all drawn out of me. (43-4)

George has “no objection to raise”:

I freely, willingly submitted to her proposal. She exercised no undue compulsion on me; she appealed to my reason, and my reason, as far as it remained, told me that her plan was sensible, and in every way worthy of her. (44)

With George as our narrator, his reason, “as far as it remain[s],” is our sole conduit of information, and we must both accept it (with no alternative) while nonetheless questioning it. His own peculiar narration confuses his status as a victim; we are forced, at least for a moment, on a threshold: is Margery his monster or his saviour?

Margery is able to calm the anxieties of the landowner by her supernaturally liminal state. She walks the line between the world of the past and the present, bridging the two and stabilizing the past in the present with securities grounded in ancient principles (the mythic, the mystical, the maternal). Though in the modern world, she is an untainted personification of the past, “brought up in the old-fashioned, hard-working, sensible ways of a farm in the reign of Good Queen Bess,” uninfected by “Gladstone-Chamberlain topsy-turveyism” which causes “farmers’ daughters to play the piano and murder French, and farmer’s wives read Miss Braddon and Ouida and neglect the cows” (42). The following description of her liminal character is interesting because it reveals how naively she emphasizes and reaffirms stabilities:

Folks could not make Margery out [...] she had never been seen before, and yet she knew the names of every tor, and hamlet, and coombe, and moor, as if she had been reared there. But

though she knew the places, she did not know the people [...] She spoke of the Tremaines of Cullacombe, whereas the family had left that house two hundred years ago [...] On the other hand, what was curious was, that Margery hit right now and then on the names of some of the labouring poor; she would salute a man by his right Christian and surname, because he was exactly like an ancestor some two hundred and fifty years ago. (42-43)

Margery “hits right” when she encounters some antique stability. She is a liminal conductor of the past in the present, reaffirming constancy and ignoring change; she is fixed in the past. Margery resonates in recognition with the poor because, as opposed to the “great families,” they “have stuck to their native villages, and reproduce from century to century the same faces, the same prejudices, the same characteristics. They are almost as unchangeable as the hills” (43). Note that Margery’s condition underscores the decay of great family estates.

Margery’s liminal state results from her dwelling in the past—as is true of George, though he is more stubborn and less naive than her. George’s struggle against modernity emphasizes his liminal state, while Margery’s mere existence emphasizes hers. When George first meets Margery, he is baffled by her “mixing up the past and the present in such an unaccountable manner” (27).

As with the peasantry, Margery initially mistakes George for an ancient ancestor who shares his name, reminiscing about how George’s ancestor courted her in precisely the same way the present George courts his Margaret (25)—an indication that his family has also produced the same old Rosedhu time and time again. This sameness indicates not progress, but stagnancy, a state, I have pointed out, which Baring-Gould associates firmly with hell in his *Origin and Development of Religious Belief* (Vol. 2, Chapter 19: The Dogma of Immortality).

Even the name “Margery of Quether” possesses liminality. It applies to two women, shared between past and present, existing in both, and a connection between

both. Before his vampire encounter, George is warned by his worker Solomon that the moor may be haunted by “Margery o’ Quether”; he assumes that Solomon refers to the present-day Margaret Palmer of Quether and that his weakness for her is being mocked. George chalks up such insolence of the working class to “Gladstone-Chamberlain general-topsy-turvyism” (15). Later, upon encountering Margery, the initial connection is established between her and George through names shared by ancestors and descendents. And, in the end, the liminality of Margery’s name, applying as it does to both the ancient and modern Margaret, causes their plan for immortality to go astray.

A Land Law Debate

I will now discuss the conclusion to *Margery of Quether*, in which the tensions between modern and ancient are raised to their peak. In accordance with Margery’s wishes, the banns between “George Rosedhu, of Foggaton, bachelor, and Margaret Palmer, of Quether, spinster” are published (45-46). George writes that, “old Margery had overshot her mark, as the sequel proved. She had not reckoned with young Margaret, her great, great, great, great grand-niece” (46). When the banns are read at church, young Margaret Palmer naturally believes that they refer to her, and that her wedding has been planned without consent. George has grown too aged for services, so Margaret and her father “[descend] on Foggaton, to know of [him] what was meant by the banns—sober earnest or silly joke” (46).

Upon arriving, the Palmers learn the extraordinary truth of the matter from Solomon, as George attempts to follow the conversation with his enfeebled senses.

Old Margery is away at nearby Mary Tavy Church. Once all is explained, Farmer Palmer declares that, since it is Bonfire Night, he will fetch “the lads” so “they can have the pleasure o’ burning the old witch instead of a man o’ straw” (48).¹³ George is mortified but too weak to do anything.

What follows is a legal debate. First, a hesitant Solomon reminds Palmer of the ambivalent legal precedent:

... what about the laws? I won’t say but that it be right and scriptural to burn a witch; for it is written, ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,’ but I reckon it be against the laws. (48)

Here Solomon considers the authority of an ancient scriptural law found in Exodus 22:18 against the authority of modern British laws. Ancient laws may permit and even demand the burning of a witch, but burning a person is prohibited by modern law. To Solomon’s counsel the shrewd yeoman responds with legal quibbling. He asks Solomon how far back the records at Brentor church extend. Solomon answers that they record no further back than around 1680, and on this Palmer establishes his case:

Very well, then they contain no record of her birth and baptism. Now you cannot be hung for killing a person of whose existence there is absolutely no legal evidence. The law won’t touch us if we do burn her.

Against Palmer’s denial of Margery’s existence, George asserts that he has made an agreement with her concerning marriage and his land:

I am bound by the most solemn engagements to my Margery. I have promised to settle Foggaton on her.

¹³ Guy Fawkes Night, or Bonfire Night, is a celebration of the failure of the Gunpowder Plot (1605), a plan to blow up Parliament and kill James I. The plot was devised by a group of conspirators who hoped to restore Catholic rule. Margery is a fitting substitute for the effigy of Fawkes, being another of the “old world” attempting to commandeer the “modern.”

To this avowal of entail on Margery, Palmer maintains his sole argument: one cannot make binding agreements with things that don't exist:

"You cannot," shouted the farmer of Quether. "The thing is impossible. You cannot marry a woman who has no existence in the eye of the law. (49)

The authoritative Farmer Palmer controls the discussion, making law the central issue. The talk of ancient and modern laws is a reminder of the Land Law debate, in which modern laws either strengthened or opposed the feudal common laws. With George's land the valued item in question, desired by representatives of past (Margery) and present (the Palmers), this debate could be seen as a miniature, farcical version of the Land Law debate.

Farmer Palmer wants Foggaton for *his* Margaret, the contemporary Margaret. When George reminds Palmer that the ancient Margery is his "own flesh and blood," he responds:

That may be, but that is no reason against her cremation. My own Margaret stands infinitely nearer to me, and her interests closer to my heart, than the person and welfare of a remote ancestress. (48-9)

Palmer places his allegiance with the present day in opposition to George, who conversely feels the past to be "infinitely dearer" than anything modern. For instance, the morning after finding Margery, George resented the advantages that a "modern" newborn had over his ancient "baby":

. . . that day a child was christened in the church. I looked at its soft pink skin, and went away from the sacred edifice with envy and anger rankling in my heart. (33)

George pities Margery's oldness in a strangely inverted outlook in relation to how others typically prize a baby's newness: "bless her!—with her old brown thumb in

her mouth.” Margery is a baby-sized vampire, and the pity and love she inspires in George give us a glimpse of his feelings towards the past.

So Palmer advocates for the new Margaret; George for the old.

By declaring the legal void that is Margery, Farmer Palmer disengages the liminality of the banns (referring as it seemingly does to both Margarets) in favor of the modern: “There is but one Margaret Palmer of Quether in this nineteenth century; that’s flat” (50). Later he says: “The banns have been called between my daughter and you; I take no account of the other, she has no legal existence” (58-9). If the ancient Margery doesn’t exist, then the banns refer only to Palmer’s daughter, and George has then pledged to marry her (which would thwart *both* “Rosedhu systems”). *Margery of Quether* is the story’s title not only because it is the name of the vampire, but also because it is the name under contest at the story’s conclusion.¹⁴

Like old Margery, Land Laws were also argued against as anachronistically feudal—not belonging “in this nineteenth century”—and furthermore as opposed to reason. The act of passing on property to a single child, yet with the full extent of inheritance reserved for *that* child’s child, was considered by many to be strange, unnatural, and unreasonable. Palmer positions his daughter as the empirically reasonable Margaret:

The only Margaret Palmer of Quether of whom the law has cognizance is she who now stands before you. She has been baptized, vaccinated, and confirmed. What more do you want to establish her existence? Whereas, what documentary proof can the other Margery produce that she exists?” (49-50)

¹⁴ Liminal names connect past and present in a related way in *Wuthering Heights* and other Gothic stories.

Palmer insists on the rational. He understands that Margery's supernatural state makes her existence a doubtful reality, easily dismissed within the reasonable realm of modern law. (Modern laws do not accommodate the fantastic like the old laws.) Palmer is the modern advocate, and here he takes on the fitting role of the utter rationalist (though with an ulterior motive of securing a land-owning husband for his daughter).¹⁵ Previously, George had presented himself as an utter rationalist, and Palmer takes on that role now. If it is not rationally provable, he argues, it doesn't exist (and therefore can be killed with impunity!).

The Gothic story depends on the threshold between these two Margerys—the rational and the fantastic—so it is an interesting action of Palmer's within the Gothic story to insist on the fantastic Margery's non-existence, which would break not only the liminality of the banns, but that of the story itself.

Palmer argues that Margery "has no existence." George argues back that she has too much existence: "That is the prime cause of her trouble; she has too much of it; she can't die" (48). Like Palmer, George argues that Margery is extraordinary, but he posits her on the other extreme fringe of existence ("she has too much of it"). Both place her on the fringes of normal existence. Palmer argues that Margery is unreal, while George seems to argue that she, being supernatural, is extremely real—even *more* real than the rationally real. Nonetheless, rationally and legally speaking,

¹⁵ This legal argument concerning the empirical existence of vampires brings to mind a statement by the rationalist Rousseau. When relating his skepticism of Biblical testimony, he mentions testimonies concerning vampires:

"If there is a well-attested history in the world, it is that of the Vampires. Nothing is missing from it: interrogations, certifications by Notables, Surgeons, Parish Priests, Magistrates. The judicial proof is one of the most complete. And with all that, who believes in Vampires? Will we all be damned for not having believed?" "Letter to Beaumont," *The Collected Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Christopher Kelly and Eve Grace, eds. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001. 9:68.

Margery's supernaturally liminal nature (being from the past yet living in the present) annuls her.

At the end of their debate Palmer administers his "crushing argument":

"Now, tell me, is it possible for a man to marry a woman from whom he is removed by from two to three centuries? Answer me that."

"Put in that bald way," [George] said, "it does seem unreasonable; but in these Radical-Gladstone-Chamberlain times one does not know where one stands. All the lines of demarcation between the possible and the impossible are wiped out, reason and fact do not jump together." (50)

As his desperate, last recourse, George appeals fruitlessly to the topsy-turvyism of his times, his chief complaint heretofore. The state of instability that once threatened Foggaton he now employs to save Margery, abandoning the original security he once fought for. George now advocates for the liminality created by modernity in its overturning of the past, opposing instead the rigidity that would be established if it overthrew the past completely. George is threatened now not by liminality but fixity. George presents himself as a practical man at times, but now he argues for impossibilities. The modern world, as represented in Palmer, has no room or patience for the fantastic, yet George argues that such uncertainty is what defines the "Radical-Gladstone-Chamberlain times"—the "period of transition" between "lines of demarcation."

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Baring-Gould reveals throughout his writing an air of Victorian skepticism, but also an openness allowing for the supernatural. I noted that, though Baring-Gould adopts a discerningly critical editorial tone in his *The Lives of the Saints*, he obviously does have faith that a good number of the miraculous acts recorded therein are factual. When Baring-Gould was a young teacher at Hurstpierpoint, he wrote for the school publication a story, "The 9:30 Up

Train” (originally published in 1853),¹⁶ which includes a topic common in his fiction and non-fiction; the protagonist, while investigating a local ghost story, is warned by his older friend of the dangers of effacing the mysterious:

Take my advice and banish it from your thoughts. When you have come to the end, you will be sadly disappointed, and will find that all the mystery evaporates, and leaves a dull, commonplace residuum. It is best that the few mysteries which remain to us unexplained should still remain mysteries, or we shall disbelieve in supernatural agencies altogether. We have searched out the arcana of nature, and exposed all her secrets to the garish eye of day, and we find, in despair, that the poetry and romance of life are gone. Are we the happier for knowing that there are no ghosts, no fairies, no witches, no mermaids, no wood spirits? (330)

We could add vampires to this list. The speaker then implies that one can think of all things as having two explanations, the scientific and the romantic, and that the romantic—in a scientific day—might easily be drained, leaving only the scientific “residuum”:

If we wish to be poetical or romantic, we must shut our eyes to facts. The head and the heart wage mutual war now. A lover preserves a lock of his mistress’s hair as a holy relic, yet he must know perfectly well that for all practical purposes a bit of rhinoceros hide would do as well—the chemical constituents are identical. If I adore a fair lady, and feel a thrill through all my veins when I touch her hand, a moment’s consideration tells me that phosphate of lime No. 1 is touching phosphate of lime No. 2—nothing more. If for a moment I forget myself so far as to wave my cap and cheer for king, or queen, or prince, I laugh at my folly next moment for having paid reverence to one digesting machine above another. (331)

Baring-Gould was an eager advocate for scientific pursuits, but he would consider the scientific “residuum” to be an insufficient *total* description of things. It is the “finite” description, but there is an “infinite” and poetic description as well, which is just as real. Love, patriotism, loyalty, etc can be explained scientifically, he would argue, but this did not explain them completely. “Ghost stories” like *Margery of Quether*, if nothing else, might train the faculties for an openness to the fantastic and spiritual. (Nonetheless, “The 9:30 Up Train” parodies the Gothic formula throughout, and ends

¹⁶ “The 9:30 Up Train,” *A Book of Ghosts*, London: Methuen, 1904 (1853).

with a rational explanation of its ghost: the entire story was a dream brought on by sleeping too hot. This ambivalence is appropriate for the Gothic genre.)

Likewise, the name Margaret Palmer of Quether is liminal, having two sides, and George is arguing for the romantic side—associated with the past—and Palmer for the realistic side—associated more with modernity. Palmer states that any “Margery” who is not provable does not exist, in effect removing the fantastic from the name and leaving only the provable “residuum.” Both sides, Baring-Gould felt, were worth exploring, but not at the expense of the other (see the introduction to his *Some Modern Difficulties* [1875]¹⁷). I do not know if Baring-Gould himself believed in the existence of vampires (as did that other eccentric clergyman and researcher Montague Summers, author of *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin* [1928]),¹⁸ but I do not doubt that he was at least open to the possibility of such a creature.

The “topsy-turvyism” George Rosedhu often speaks of is, we might infer, the flipping over from a thing to its opposite, in this case from the past to the present. The topsy-turvy *moment*—the moment *felt* as topsy-turvy—is the moment of past meeting present, the liminal time when the two share a single space (the actual state of any conceivable time, though more apparent at certain times). This liminal state is that to which George appeals. Palmer’s “crushing argument” asks if such liminality between past and present is even possible: the present-day George and his ancient fiancé are “removed” from each other by “two to three centuries.”

¹⁷ *Some Modern Difficulties: Nine Lectures*, London: W. Skeffington, 1875.

¹⁸ *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*, London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1928.

Lost and Saved at the Same Time

George's plea to spare Margery is dismissed. The room becomes filled with "men and boys" with "savage delight" in their eyes (53) and a pyre for Margery burns outside. This rural mob displays their own terrible liminality: normally, they appear "wonderfully gentle, kindly, and free from brutality, and yet—scratch the man and the beast appears" (55). Even more so than Margery, this mob is portrayed as monstrous. They resemble the vampire's mythic cousin, the werewolf, researched by Baring-Gould in *The Book of Were-Wolves* (1865). They are depicted as genuinely frightening, and they certainly frighten the vampire.

Faced with inhuman torture (and even supernatural torture), Margery agrees to restore George's youth. She then takes George by the hands and transfers youth and health back to him, waning as he waxes stronger. With some of his strength restored, George shakes himself free of Margery, allowing her to retain some of his youthfulness, though she has now aged considerably. Still elderly yet with renewed vigor, George gives an impassioned speech to force the rabble from his home—a landowner's fantasy of repulsing the Radical threat:

Everyone of you listen to me. This is my house, and an Englishman's house is his castle. Leave this room, leave my land at once, or I prosecute every man jack of you for burglary and trespass. Good Lord! Do you know where you are? Do you know who I am? This is Foggaton, and I am a Rosedhu. Gladstone and Chamberlain and that Harcourt fellow haven't brought matters quite so far yet that every dirty Radical may come inside a landed proprietors doors and snap his fingers under his nose. (58)

The awed invaders slink out of Foggaton. Only the determined Palmers remain.

Farmer Palmer says that he will still allow the blood-thirsty peasantry to burn Margery unless George relents to marry young Margaret within the month. George suggests they wait two or three more years, "with the principle of the family at heart"

(59). He is backed into a corner, desperately trying to reinstitute the original Rosedhu system. Palmer refuses; a month's time is all that is offered. George, left with no alternative, concedes with a sigh, for he can still hear the blazing bonfire: "A howl from without—a fresh faggot was cast on the fire. The pyre was not on my ground but on a bit of waste adjoining the lane, and as I am not lord of the manor I have no rights over it. That the rascals knew" (60). The pyre which compels George to quick marriage is appropriately located on the *limen*, the threshold of Foggaton, which George has no say over because, despite what people may call him, he does not have the rights of a lord.

This mob scene brings about a swift change in tone. Early on the story is a blatant satire of the landowner, his system of entail, and his irrational fears. The conclusion, however, sees those fears, the nebula of radical democracy, made real as an actual mob invading his land and home. Satirical fears are mixed in the conclusion with sincere fear. George looks around to discover all of his earlier fears come to life.

The mob stands with Palmer as part of the invasion of modernity on the ancient landed estate of Foggaton. This invasion, as concurring with George and other landowners' fears, is enabled by legal maneuvering. George asserts that the crowd desires to burn Margery not because she is a witch, but because they have been told they are in no danger of the law. The anxieties of the landowner are suddenly given more weight. With revolutions in Europe in the background of British consciousness, even those who desired change, like the conservative landowners, were hesitant for a too sudden change which would truly make Britain topsy-turvy, violently overturned. This rabble, quickly devolving into animals, is a picture of the

feared revolutionary mob in England. The conservatives argued that the loss of landed estates would result in a loss of national structure, allowing a feral revolution of democratic forces.

Though George is initially mocked, we are impelled into sympathy with both him and his monster (a common enough authorial move by Baring-Gould, as in *Mehalah*). George's nightmare of invasion is not from the ancient vampire Margery, whose plan and person he admires, but from the rabble, associated by George with Nihilists, Communists, etc. (though actually incited by a greedy, "rational" landowner). The mob scene suggests that the monstrous is to be found in the present as well as the past.

This monstrous mob is a reversal of the typical Gothic invasion, and at cross-purposes with the "Gothic invasion" of Margery and George. Normally the relatively content modern world is thrown into disarray by an invasion from the past. Now the modern rabble surges in upon George's happy world of vampirism, wherein George has discovered a system for stably preserving his ancient vampire "ruin" and land. A modern invasion on the past seems just as unavoidable as the normal Gothic invasion, as if the non-liminal state cannot last long without a "liminalizing" invasion (though such invasions themselves threaten to establish a converse non-liminal state). The past cannot of course ignore the "ruining" effect of the present, and Gothic fiction repeatedly informs us that the present cannot successfully ignore the past either.

Dual dangers are thus presented: the ridiculous conservative is possessed and drained by the Gothic monster (who is nonetheless sympathetic) while the erosive modern threatens revolutionary chaos. The dangers of both are presented (though

with a noticeable conservative bias; this is *George's* narrative, after all). These dual dangers constitute the contradictory fear of Gothic fiction: a fear of the past contrasted and balanced by a fear of modernity.

This ambivalence of the monstrous seems related to Baring-Gould's belief in striking a balance between such opposites as the medieval and the modern.

Throughout his life, Baring-Gould maintained the need—in politics, religion, and everything else—for a conciliation of contradictory arguments. As in *Mehalah*, the ultimate danger in *Margery* is not in past or present but in either side “winning”—thus cutting off liminality, the normal human condition that allows expansion and development. As I move towards the conclusion of this chapter, I would like to consider how Baring-Gould's liminal tendency finds expression in his distinctive use of the vampire.

The Vampire and the Curse of Eternal Life

As vampire stories necessarily are, this story is about life and death, as indicated by the dreadful immortality (or, rather, perpetual mortality) of Margery. The ancient Rosedhu system is designed to churn out one identical Rosedhu after another, forever; similarly, the new “Rosedhu system” is based on draining the life out of successive husbands, “*ad infinitum*” (44). Their bond identifies a similar horror in both systems.

Margery's condition results from her fear of death, as she explains when George discovers her on Brentor:

“I made my mistake when I prayed for life,” said the old woman. “I was so joyous and fond of life and full of giddiness that I used to pray every Sunday when I came to church, and every evening when I said my Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that I might never die. I were

also mortal afraid of death. The graves here [on Brentor] be digged out of the living stone, and be full of water afore the coffins be splashed into them, and the corpses don't moulder; they sop away and go off the bones just as if they was boiled to rags. That terrified me, so I always prayed for one only thing, that I might never die, and my prayer hev been heard and answered." (27)

Margery's curse alludes to the Greek story of the Cumean Sibyl, who is also granted immortality without eternal youth. Like Margery, the Sibyl ages and withers into a smaller and smaller state, until she is kept hanging in a jar (like Margery hanging from the bell rope?). Here is a haunting portion of the myth written around 62-65 A.D by Petronius in his *Satyricon*:

For once I saw with my own eyes the Cumean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked taunting the Sibyl: *What do you want?* she answered: *I want to die.*¹⁹

When George first meets Margery, he asks if she is a spirit:

"Spirit—spirit!" she echoed. "Lauk a mussy! I wish I was! Spirit! No such luck comed to me yet. If I was I'd be thankful! Ah!"
Before her cursed immortality, Margery feared death. When George meets

her, hundreds of years later, she desires death. These contrasting attitudes toward death provide an opportunity for the reader to reconsider mortality.²⁰

George's conservative desire to remain the same thwarts any expansion or advancement of person. His desire (as mirrored in the misguided prayer of Margery) is to maintain the land—that is, the dirt, the material, the mortal—into perpetuity. The purpose of the Land Laws was to fix a family intractably to a particular piece of land. As I have said, Baring-Gould often associated such stagnancy with hell, as he

¹⁹ This quotation serves as the epigraph of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*.

²⁰ Coincidentally, another Victorian text on perpetual mortality, Tennyson's poem "Tithonus," was published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in February 1860, twenty-four years before *Margery* (the original form, "Tithon," was written in 1833). The poem, drawn from Greek myth, is narrated by Tithonus, who was granted immortality but not eternal youth. He grows forever older and desires death, while his consort Eos, the goddess of dawn, is reborn in youthfulness every morning—an image reminiscent not only of cursed, decrepit Margery, but also of the aged, complaining George beside his "reborn" Margery. An influence on *Margery of Quether*?

associated eternal progress with heaven. Strangely enough, the equally conservative Margery causes George to change through his emasculation and merging with the fantastic. In this way he separates his love of the past and his land from the stressful, business-like system of entail in a sort of religious escape. Death by Margery provides a way for George to free himself from his land while also preserving its integrity. In the end George is saved from death, but this interferes with his salvation *through* death. Both the Sibyl and Margery express a desire for release from the physical form. For Margery, the mortal life is enjoyable, but perpetual mortality becomes a prison. Death for Margery is then a release into a spiritual form. George also feels himself to be freed from his role as Rosedhu “rooster” to a spiritual sublimation as “Gallus,” when drawn by his death into the immortal being of Margery.

The mortal, then, properly has a limit. When absolute, it is inhuman and nightmarish. A person needs relief in a transfer from a thing (life) to its opposite (death). Despite this connection of death with salvation, the tone and conclusion of *Margery* suggests that a *complete* abandonment to one side, such as in the opposition of the modern and the ancient, is misguided. The threshold self should be maintained, which requires spanning dichotomies.

The Vampire and the Economy of Energy

The *vampire* is defined as:

A preternatural being of a malignant nature (in the original and usual form of the belief, a reanimated corpse), supposed to seek nourishment, or do harm, by sucking the blood of sleeping persons; a man or woman abnormally endowed with similar habits. (The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989.)

The traditional vampire is a thief, a revenant of the past draining the life of the present in an unnatural sustainment of existence. I have mentioned the “Gothic-ness” of the Land Laws, and the figure of the vampire is particularly relevant. Many in the nineteenth century saw Land Laws as a vampiric system, being of the past yet draining energy from the present and thereby causing a host of evils. In entail, dictums of the dead controlled those in the living present. Estates often wasted away to appease the demands of the past. *Margery* joins along with these critiques of the Land Law system as vampiric by its implication of vampirism as a parallel to that system.

Nonetheless, the story also complicates this implication—not by simply making the victim complicit, which can be seen in other vampire works such as Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872),²¹ but by making the victim suddenly active in the distribution of his own energy, and *nobly* choosing to allow the vampire a portion, as in George Rosedhu’s experience:

As she held my hands, I felt as if streams of vital force were flowing from her up my arms into my body. The aching in my bones ceased. My legs became stronger, my head lighter and more erect, I could see better, and hear better. I began to smell the peat burning on the hearth, I felt an inclination to draw Margery on to my knees and kiss her ; but when I looked at her, the desire passed, she was waning as I waxed. She grew older, the colour left her cheek, her eyes became dim ; then, all at once I sprang to my feet and shook off her hands. “Enough, Margery, enough,” I said. “You have restored to me sufficient of my strength and health, the rest I freely make over to you.” (57-8)

Though not yet restored to youth, George sacrifices some of his life to Margery. He has received “sufficient” energy to answer the demands of the modern moment.

This economy of energy occurs, appropriately, on the threshold between past and present. George is presented as standing on a threshold between the two Margaret Palmers of Quether (like that other George in the “Black or Gold” chapter

²¹ *In a Glass Darkly*, ed. Robert Tracy, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993 [1872].

of *Mehalah*). Though forced into this position by the invasion of “modernity,” he is yet presented as in the mind of one making a choice between the two (always with a preference for old Margery). This is the dichotomy of old versus new, the grand dichotomy for which the Land Laws stood as a dividing symbol.

In the front of all, as if in a cockpit, opposite each other, stood the two Margarets, red in face, blazing in temper, their tongues going, their eyes sparkling, their hands extended. I will say that poor Margery acted solely on the defensive. (53)

After the energy transfer, the difference between the two is more significant:

I was silent, and looked from Margery to Margaret. [...] Certainly Margery looked aged, a hale woman, but still old too old to be thought of as a bride at the hymeneal altar. Margaret was young and pretty; I wish she had not been quite so young and opened such an alarming vista of possibilities. But then I looked at myself in a glass opposite, and saw that I was grey-headed and on the turn down the hill of life. That was an advantage. “There is one thing,” I said musingly; “in the matter of amiability there is no comparison. Margery is as good—”
 “We will have no comparisons drawn,” interrupted Palmer. . . (59)

George compares the two, considering their respective strengths. The old and new are distinctly opposed yet merging and connected through their shared name. This is the Janus-faced Gothic (also enacted in the intertwining of ancient and modern laws). The two Margerys are opposites as past and present, yet they are related by blood and are both potential brides for George.

During the energy transfer, George can be seen as on this threshold between the two Margarets, balancing out of his own energy between the demands of the past and the necessities of the present. The old and new Margery both desire Foggaton, so George is “divided up” by their contest even as he stands on the threshold of choice between the two.

The modern Margery states that the life-energy George has given to old Margery has been taken from her, as the youthfulness of young George has been

drained away, leaving her to marry an old man (of course the old Rosedhu system would have done the very same):

Don't you see I bear her a grudge? She has turned the fresh and hale George who courted me into a shrivelled old man. It would have been a pleasure to have young George, it is a penance to have the old one. I owe her that, and I shall scratch her eyes out when we meet. (52)

The energy of George is a limited supply which is divided amongst the two Margerys, past and present. Giving to one affects the other.

The idea to be inferred is that the man of the present can choose to balance energies directed towards things of the past and things of the present. The “vampire” of the past, though potentially a danger, should receive proper appreciation and care. George is attempting to rescue Margery as he has attempted to rescue the church on Brentor and his own Foggaton. Traditionally, the vampire is interested only in self-preservation at the expense of the victim (which seems to be true of Margery as well, though not malignantly so). In this case, the “victim” is also interested in the preservation of the vampire.

Likewise, the “ruins” of the past—being the traditions, architecture, etc—should be given some “energy” of the present, so that they do not decay to a state like St. Michael's on Brentor and ancient Margery (a positive “maintained decay” as opposed to a negative “crumbling decay”). Nonetheless, energy must also be devoted to more progressive ends: science, reform, and the other various tendencies of the present spirit. Such conciliation would, in Baring-Gould's theory, avoid the stagnation caused by a too exclusive devotion to past or present.

A Wide Berth

Driven away in the end, Margery's "invasion" fails, but George is at least able to save her from the fire. It is a slight victory for him, like his partial rescue of the decaying church of Brentor. Foggaton remains under threat, however, since both his Rosedhu systems have been foiled.

As he closes his tale, George states that the purpose of his narrative is "to let people know that Margery of Quether is about somewhere". He believes she has retreated back "into the remotest parts of Dartmoor" (60). He knows that the number of visitors to Dartmoor is increasing and trusts that, since her story is now known, Margery will be given "a wide berth" (61).

Mysterious Dartmoor has been the home of numerous legends and supernatural figures of Devonshire folklore. Upon meeting Margery, George recalls a folk story from his childhood about the "Undying One," picturing her in his memory alongside a host of other creatures of Dartmoor legend:

I remembered now to have heard, when a boy, of a certain girl who was said to have been so much in love with life that she had prayed she might never die, and who, accordingly, was doomed to live for ever; but I thought that she raced on stormy nights with a white owl hooting before her over the moors in the train of the Black Hunter and the Wisht Hounds.
(29)²²

Baring-Gould's creation of Margery was his own addition to Dartmoor folklore.

The increase in visitors to Dartmoor could be equated with the advance of modernity—science, reason, and progress—on the realm of the old and fantastic.

²² The Black Hunter (or Dark Huntsman) hunted for un-baptized babies. The Wisht Hounds, at times said to travel with the Black Hunter, inspired Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-2). Dartmoor legends can be found in Baring-Gould's *Dartmoor Idylls* (1896), *A Book of Dartmoor* (1900), and in his novel *Urith: A Tale of Dartmoor* (1891). Baring-Gould's *A Book of Dartmoor* was a great resource for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and both *The Hound* and *Margery of Quether* are Gothic works that contain a mix of rationality and the fantastic, though in quite different ways.

George would then be asking that, in the midst of progress, space be given to the old ways. This is especially interesting since Baring-Gould was, as an amateur archeologist, one of those who attempted to understand the mysteries of Dartmoor.

By telling the story of Margery, George allows her a space within the story to exist. The story itself seems to contend subtly (among other things) that one needs a place for the fantastic, the spiritual, and the infinite; otherwise one is constricted and development is hampered. Baring-Gould's idea of advancement requires a state of becoming between maintained opposites—in this case, change and constancy. Without the spiritual, one is trapped, like Margery and George, in mortality. The slack, unresolved nature of liminality can be unsettling (as it is, at first, for George), but it also gives room to move and develop. It is the static condition of tight, defined places that the story displays as truly horrifying, as George discovers once all of his “Rosedhu systems” have failed. Though George's physical life is saved, this rescue leaves him unfulfilled. He is suddenly de-liminalized. To use his own prosaic phrase, he is trapped “under a dish-cover which [doesn't] quite fit” (17).

Perhaps Baring-Gould was expressing some of his own struggles “on the threshold” through George in a sort of self-parody. There are many similarities between the author and his character, such as land ownership in Devon and veneration for the past (and of course Baring-Gould certainly drew inspiration from actual yeomen he knew in the area as well).

I discussed in the last chapter how the decaying church was a meaningful and personal symbol to Baring-Gould, related to his Tractarian desire for church reform. I also mentioned how Lew Church had been decorated by Sabine's grandfather in a

garish style that conflicted with Sabine's Anglo-Catholic principles. As a boy of fifteen, Baring-Gould hid away the discarded ancient screens of his family church so that he could one day restore them, "for even at the age of fifteen there was forming in his mind a plan that was to become one of the main objects of his life: the complete restoration of Lew Trenchard church" (Dickinson 23).

Reminiscent of George Rosedhu's impassioned defense of St. Michael's church *and* his rescue of Margery is the picture of Baring-Gould seventeen years later recovering "fragments of the old woodwork" from "the belfry of the church and in the lumber-room and outbuildings of Lew House" (Dickinson 23). As with George rescuing Margery of Quether after she had been hidden in the church belfry, Baring-Gould rescued these fragments of the past for the purpose of restoring and preserving them.

As the squire of Lew Trenchard, Baring-Gould was as involved in the system of inheritance as George Rosedhu. In a fascinating letter of 7 July 1871,²³ Baring-Gould's father writes to Sabine at East Mersea to discuss the matter of entail:

But I have another, totally different matter to speak about. The settlement of the Lew property. By the law no property can be entailed beyond three lives, two being in existence – Hence at my father's death the entail ceased (or would have ceased had I not renewed it) the consequence would have been that at his death I might have sold it in total or in parts and given it to whom I liked even away from my own family. My father wished to prevent any possibility of my so doing and I myself having no such intention acquiesced in his wish to re-entail the property adding to that entail the alternate presentation of the Living which I purchased off my father. [...] Now I have no interest whatever in urging you to this step excepting a wish to keep the property intact – I could at present will, that so many farms should go to Willy, so many to Drakey, Arthur, Maggy and Lilah [*sic*] – but that is not my wish. I would leave all the property to you (provided it was re-entailed) leaving moderate jointures to the younger children to revert to the property at their death.

²³ I present this letter (held by the Devon Record Office in Box 25, Deposit Box 5203) as transcribed by Ron Wawman. The transcription, accompanied by Wawman's helpful commentary, is available on his website as part of the "Early Family Correspondence of Sabine Baring-Gould" (*Never Completely Submerged Home Page*).

His father goes on to say that he does not ask for Sabine to re-entail because he does not trust him, but because “circumstances do arise during a person’s life to make him wish to sell portions of it to meet demands and difficulties which in a little time disappear.” He says that, if it were not for the entail, he might have sold parts of Lew Trenchard after he faced losses in mining speculation.

Obviously the procedures and pressures of entail were intimately known to Sabine. Yet he shared his father’s desire to maintain the family land and the line of Baring-Gould squires. Sabine was very proud of his family and their heritage, and, when his father died, shortly after writing the above letter and meeting with his son on the matter, Sabine became deeply involved in researching his family history.

Despite the satire of entail and the conservative landowner found in *Margery of Quether*, and despite Baring-Gould’s support of Gladstone and extreme dislike of Disraeli and the Tories, Baring-Gould was nonetheless a supporter of strong landed estates in England. In *An Old English Home and its Dependencies* (1898) he argues that without a strong landowning class all is neglected, divided, ruined, weakened, etc.²⁴ He argues that the non-inheriting sons of a landed estate benefit from their lot by being compelled into inventive enterprise. He also argues that real property can become a paralyzing influence some would be better without—and thus mass distribution of the land would have a damaging effect on the populace.

If *Margery* is Baring-Gould’s self-parody, then it is self parodying self in the sense that the satire proceeds from his more progressive inclinations directed at the more conservative ones, with those conservative inclinations stirring forth as well.

²⁴ *An Old English Home and its Dependencies*, London: Methuen & Co., 1898.

This explains why *Margery* is a satire of a conservative landowner while also containing a conservative landowner's fantasy. George's ambivalent, liminal attitude seems consciously modeled on the author's.

Self-parody would also explain the abrupt changes in tone. George's fears are mocked, then realized; for a short while the frightful atmosphere relaxes into melodrama, only for the melodrama to solidify into noble drama momentarily. The oscillation of tone is considerable yet not jarring, partially because the incongruous narrative is masterfully connected to the incongruous narrator, and partially because satire and irony remain the dominant tone, allowing occasional emergences of sincerity which can be easily either accepted or dismissed within the general ironic attitude.

Baring-Gould is certainly parodying George's desires even while presenting them as sympathetic and even necessary. Writing Gothic fiction allows an author to vent threshold anxieties by creating a fictional unity out of the contradictory past and present. Gothic fiction allows a space for these contradictions, a space for liminality between the real and the fantastic. One of the many pleasures of *Margery of Quether* is that the character of George, who has a Gothic experience, and then writes it down, very evidently shares the threshold temperament and desires of the *actual* writer (a threshold temperament furthermore embodied by the story's Gothic monster). Through George, Baring-Gould is asking that we give a "wide berth" to the story's vampire, a space for her (and her kind) in the modern world, thus cultivating a liminal, "Gothic" attitude.

Baring-Gould and the Vampire Tradition

As I stated in the Introduction, *Margery of Quether* (while misspelled) is mentioned in one of *Dracula*'s first reviews:

In seeking for a parallel to this weird, powerful, and horrible story our mind reverts to such tales as "The Mysteries of Udolpho," "Frankenstein," "Wuthering Heights," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "Marjery of Quether." But "Dracula" is even more appalling in its gloomy fascination than any one of these. (*The Daily Mail*, 1 June 1897)

Richard Dalby argues that *Margery* was mentioned in this review because it was *the* vampire story of the 1880s:

If Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was the most celebrated vampire story of the 1870s, 'Margery of Quether' was probably the best known and most widely read vampire story in the succeeding decade (thanks to the huge sales of the *Cornhill*), chronologically lying exactly halfway between *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. (x)²⁵

Furthermore, Baring-Gould has contributed to the vampire genre by other means; Dalby writes that "*The Book of Were-wolves* (1865), *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1877, omnibus edn.), *Germany, Present and Past* (1879, 2 volumes), and *Curiosities of Olden Times* (1895) were all mentioned in Stoker's working notes for *Dracula*" (xi).

Even so, as with all of Baring-Gould's work, and particularly his fiction, *Margery of Quether* is mostly forgotten.²⁶ Furthermore, Baring-Gould is rarely given

²⁵ Introduction, *Margery of Quether and Other Weird Tales*, Mountain Ash, Wales: Sarob Press, 1999.

²⁶ After the *Cornhill* Magazine run of 1884, *Margery of Quether* has found limited printings. The 1891 Methuen collection *Margery of Quether and Other Stories* had a relatively short run, with subsequent editions in 1898 and 1899 (these versions missing the Furniss illustrations found in the original). An American version of this collection was printed in 1892 by the J.W. Lovell Company. An paperback "English Library" version was also published in 1892 in Leipzig by Heinemann & Balestier (Dalby x)

A century later, *Margery of Quether* has been reprinted by small publishing houses. These have followed the Methuen model, using *Margery* as the leading title in a collection of Baring-Gould short stories. Richard Dalby has compiled *Margery of Quether* along with a different selection of Baring-Gould's more overlooked short stories in *Margery of Quether and Other Weird Tales* (Sarob Press, 1999). Rebecca Tope of Praxis Books has assembled *Margery of Quether and Other Strange*

a mention in discussions of the vampire genre, despite his influence. Dalby bemoans the neglect of *Margery*, stating that “it has never appeared in any of the numerous vampire anthologies” (ix). A study of vampire literature will usually leap without pause from Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* of 1872 to Stoker’s *Dracula* of 1897 —leaving a glaring thirty-five-year gap in the tradition *Margery* could ably fill. Even the more detailed chronologies are prone to ignore *Margery*, even while including stories which merely suggest vampirism.

What is the reason for *Margery*’s neglect? It is an involving and memorable story that rewards re-reading, yet it has fallen by the wayside. It was not resurrected in the wake of *Dracula*’s incredible popularity, perhaps because it does not share that novel’s blood-curdling tone and its appeal to what would become a popular infatuation with the Dracula-type vampire figure. Perhaps because of the forces that shaped it, *Margery* is simply too inscrutable, even for a vampire tale.

Nonetheless, *Margery of Quether* is a vampire tale of considerable wit and depth. It is a fantasy Gothic tale for the late-Victorian landowner, and, by a slight metaphorical extension, any late Victorian with anxieties about losing foundational “ground” in the topsy-turvy nineteenth century and *fin-de-siècle*. It is also a satire of the conservative landowning class, written by a landowner with personal interest in the fortunes of this class. As I stated earlier, the English Land Question is “central to an understanding of nineteenth-century political history” (Thompson 23). As a whole, *Margery* is the Land Law debate dramatized as a vampire tale—perhaps the only Gothic story related so directly focused on the Land Law debates, and perhaps

and *Curious Tales* (2009) with yet a different collection of Baring-Gould’s short stories, some chosen for their theme of vampiric activity (“The Sleeping Sister” and “A Dead Finger”).

the only work of fiction in which those debates are presented as essentially Gothic. It deserves to have its place in the vampire tradition, being worthy of its more famous vampire neighbors and the tradition as a whole.

Conclusion

The Squarson's Gothic Fiction

I live now in a dream-world where there is no line drawn between the possible and the impossible. –Elijah Rebow in *Mehalah* (1880), p. 262

All the lines of demarcation between the possible and the impossible are wiped out, reason and fact do not jump together. –George Rosedhu in *Margery of Quether* (1884), p. 50

Gothic fiction is built upon the Gothic threshold idea, as introduced in *The Castle of Otranto*, and each Gothic writer since Walpole has been able to adjust and remold this idea. Studying Baring-Gould's life and novels around the time of *Mehalah* and *Margery of Quether* provides some insight into his particular use of the Gothic threshold as a parson and squire.

Though very different texts, both tragic *Mehalah* and satirical *Margery* are built upon a Gothic threshold foundation. They contain "threshold" characters who battle over oppositions related ultimately to the categories of the ancient and the modern. *Mehalah* stands between competing cousins, the "ancient" Elijah and "modern" George. Elijah and *Mehalah* are both presented as "threshold" characters, battling within a social dialectic of freedom and restriction while containing an internal version of this dialectic.

Margery is the story of George Rosedhu, an indecisive character similar to, and perhaps a further development of, *Mehalah*'s George De Witt. Like the earlier George, George Rosedhu stands at a threshold of choice between two women; in this way he becomes a threshold regulator of his own energy between the ancient Margery and the modern Margaret, attempting to establish a proper balance between them.

In both of these works the idea of choosing between ancient and modern is associated with marriage (and with a ruined church), and in both the theme of marriage is interwoven with the equally important theme of land. In some ways certain characters resemble Baring-Gould. Elijah is Mehalah's landlord and a type of preacher attempting to both possess Mehalah and aid in what he sees as the only proper path for her spiritual development. George Rosedhu is chiefly identified as a landowner struggling with the anxieties of that position in changing and difficult times. He finds potential salvation in a religious-like experience provided by a vampire. Both stories blend religion and land-owning characters, situations, and anxieties within their use of the Gothic threshold.

In these details one can see how Baring-Gould's use of Gothic threshold was connected to his roles as squire and parson. As I have discussed, the Rev. Baring-Gould was likely a significant influence on the eventual direction of the second wave of the Oxford Movement. His fiction should be considered as part of the movement's literature; and, as a fascinating expression of the second wave's ideas and concerns, his fiction is engaged in the drawing together of the widening schisms between ancient and modern ways. A religiously resonant struggle between ancient and modern is central to Baring-Gould's fiction.

Baring-Gould held a similar interest in balance connected to his estate and his role as country squire. He appreciated and attempted to preserve the old rural way of life built around the manor house, while he also sought progressive reform by encouraging education and providing fairer treatment for his tenants and workers—trying to find a balance between the good of both the old and new ways. As a writer

Baring-Gould attempted to preserve a fading way of life in rural England through his novels, folklore collections, and other works. He was a keen and pioneering collector of folk music, and he attempted to present folklore and folk music in such way that it would be appreciated by his modern audience.

By studying the threshold constructs of these works, I have noticed that Baring-Gould's use of the Gothic threshold seems to have involved a strange literary "hobby" of constructing miniature battle scenes based on larger confrontations involving the ancient and the modern. *Mehalah* is in many ways a Gothic miniaturization and displacement to rural England of the French Revolution, a conflict which corresponded for Baring-Gould with contemporary struggles over religious controversies. The larger battle is placed in the English countryside and so is made to be small-scale and provincial, though the extremity of the Gothic threshold scenario causes the miniaturization to point back to the larger battle. Similarly, George's debate with Farmer Palmer in *Margery* can be seen as a Gothic miniature of the Land Law debate. Perhaps these miniature battles on the Gothic threshold are a distillation of Baring-Gould's philosophical consideration of ideas and quandaries emerging from these bellicose events, converted into the "palpable" and understandable form of a provincial Gothic tale, a method discussed in his *Court Royal* (1886) preface.

Both works present battles between ancient and modern forces as strenuous, but the greatest horror, presented in the conclusion of both, is the conclusion of combat, which results in a loss of the Gothic threshold passageway by which the two battle, engage, merge, etc. This horror represents Baring-Gould's desire to maintain

this space of a threshold “between the possible and the impossible,” and, concurrently, between the modern and the ancient. Baring-Gould believed in progress, but its goal, as in his understanding of heaven, was not a place of calm and rest, but of continued, never-ending struggle and development. Thus Baring-Gould believed that the schisms of his day should not be allowed to widen; rather, combating philosophies should be held in a sustained contradiction in which their opposite truths could be pondered. This sustained contradiction is what Baring-Gould creates in his fiction—until their conclusions, at least.

Though Baring-Gould eventually resented his novel-writing as a profitable yet unimportant task taking time from more worthy pursuits, he regularly did become engrossed in his novels as he invested his thoughts and emotions in the hypothetical threshold space they provided (Dickinson 84). Furthermore, his novels did provide him with the practical, financial support to pursue as squarson his three purposes at Lew Trenchard: restoring Lew Manor and the entire estate, restoring Lew Church, and restoring the spiritual life of Lew Trenchard.

It was not from the rents that Sabine received as a landlord, nor from the small stipend that he earned as rector of the parish, that he managed in the course of years to bring up his enormous family, to rebuild his home, his farms and his cottages, and to remodel his whole property, but from the money he received from his books. (Dickinson 106)

The hypothetical spaces of the novels then helped fund a literal space within his estate and parish borders for crafting some sort of balance between old and new. The desires and anxieties involved in creating this literal space can be studied as the same or similar to those involved with creating a hypothetical space in his Gothic fiction.

Baring-Gould is a neglected writer, and unfairly so. His fiction is generally well written, and it often surprises in its unexpected developments and suddenly

revealed complexity of characters and themes. Baring-Gould, in his strongest works, displays a passionate and elaborate engagement with the Gothic threshold idea.

Gothic fiction allowed him to linger in the twilight moment of transition into modernity and work through his ambivalent attitude towards the tension between the ancient and the modern.

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